

jaw.

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jaw.

by [saintaches](#)

Summary

Dream and George attend the same prestigious conservatoire, and they fucking hate each other.

Notes

Hiya, this fic is full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, unrealisms etc etc, but it's all in the name of smut and melodrama so I'm sure you don't mind.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Dream *hates* George.

He hates how he cradles his violin as if it's made of air, he hates how his hands arc in moonlight swathes across a dark wood fingerboard. He hates the way he sits in his chair, perfect posture, bow thumb bent and wrist curved as he knocks it in even vibrato. His lips as they press together, demure and pink and loathsome. A pale neck, too long, too elegant and too fucking typical for a violinist.

In essence, there's nothing *interesting* about George, nothing which suggests he gives a fuck about the music he's playing.

A longing surges through his veins, a longing to tear the strings from George's stupidly expensive strad and draw them tight around his swan neck. Listen to the noises he'd make as the air escapes him, broken and beautifully imperfect. Dream thinks he would despise it, thinks he'd be embarrassed by how pitchy his voice would come out. It only makes him want to do it more.

Their cauldron of hatred is fuelled by ageing coals, and it's only a matter of time before it begins to spit acid. The salt mill grinds. Lightning cracks its whip. Dream and George spin up a frenzy, dancing so violently that blood begins to drip from their soles.

It nourishes the ash they stand upon, and a firebird blooms.

Dream is running late to rehearsal.

He's narrowly missed by a taxi as he hurries across the road, the driver of it not best pleased by his jaywalking attempt. It coasts off in a blur of yellow, headlights slicing through the drivel and sleet. Music filters over his headphones, blurs the humdrum of the city to a rainy backwash with laidback flair. Steam blows out of a manhole cover. The drains gush with grey plumes, miserable spectres which wail and whine their song of dissonant synchronicity.

His coffee cup is emptied as he swallows the dregs, grimacing at the taste as it sweeps over his tongue in a torrent of sunbaked asphalt and chewed tobacco leaves. But the weight of early morning hours spent practicing presses upon him, and the caffeine feels pretty alright when it's curling its metallic fingers into his stomach. A quick motion sends the cup tumbling into a bin. The violin case slung over his shoulders bumps against his back as he paces towards the rehearsal venue, picking his way over a soaking sidewalk because he's the *soloist* for this fucking concerto and he really shouldn't be late.

Automatic doors accept him with a glass embrace.

Rain drips from his hair as he crosses the atrium, footsteps brisk because the rehearsal is supposed to begin in five minutes. He can hear the din of the orchestra even through his headphones, the cacophony of noise which accompanies a group of twenty-something year olds each provided with an instrument waiting for the rehearsal to start. It exhausts him, drains the creative energy right out

of his soul—something about standing in a windowless room for the next few hours is tiresome as all hell. He can't imagine what.

Here comes your man...

Dream shoulders his way through the double doors.

A few people look up when he enters, all starry eyes and awed gazes. Dream doesn't like it. He's never liked when people stare at him like he's made of marble, like he's hewn from Sistine plaster and divine sunlight. *Prodigy*, is what they say. It's a little insulting, because Dream would hate to think anyone listens to his playing and believes he's been put on earth by godly hands when the last note is still bouncing around the concert hall. Spiked and jagged, perfectly raw in a way that's not supposed to be heavenly.

He prefers the other names more. *Freak, devil*. They're incited by hatred, and he'd rather have flies crawling out of his eye sockets than strangers kissing his feet.

His gaze falls upon the first violin section, scans along the row of players mindlessly warming up until he finds what he's looking for. A source of sharpness, a diversion from the soft whispers tucked behind open palms and favourable faces upturned towards him as though he's the sun. Dream bristles as he looks at George, clenching his fists so hard he's sure he'll have red crescents imprinted upon his skin once he relaxes, because he's all perfect hair and perfect clothes and perfect skin despite the polluted rain plaguing New York. A pale jaw, held as if by cloudy pillars. Poised. Pretentious.

The worst part is how placated he looks. George doesn't appear remarkable to the casual observer, with his fingers resting as delicately as always upon the neck of his violin. He sits with his legs crossed for now, an eyebrow quirked towards his hairline. But Dream can see annoyance sparking somewhere in the pools of his eyes, a flicker of soul glimmering as he watches Dream set his violin case down by the wall and fiddle with the clasps.

George is pissed, alright. He's crackling with polar cyclones.

Dream thinks he'll set his alarm later tomorrow.

He approaches George once he's slammed his case shut again, just to watch the way he sours and sours with irritation until lemon trees grow from his stomach. George has to crane his neck to look up at Dream even when they're standing—it's only worsened because he refuses to get to his feet and greet him.

"Good morning," Dream chirps, violin tucked under his arm. He's pressing his thumb flat against the bow to test its tautness. It comes away powdery.

George's expression doesn't shift. Dream would quite like to rearrange his proportions with his fists, punch with steel capped knuckles until blood ruins his flawless skin and his nose sets all wrong. He always looks so fucking *satisfied* with himself, and it paints his vision rose madder. "Morning," he says, as if he's just pushed Dream into an ice swimming hole.

"You don't seem too pleased to see me."

"I'm not."

"That's not very cordial of you."

That earns him a snort. "You're late, Dream." A metronome ticks along with each word.

He tugs his phone from his back pocket, the appearance of it only aggravating George further. Dream glances at the time, flips it around with a lazy flick to display the rounded numbers. "I'm actually two minutes early," he says, just to watch the way red flares in the space between them.

"And when were you thinking of warming up?"

A shrug. Loose, relaxed. "I'm sure I'll manage."

"You don't deserve to be the soloist."

George's desk partner is listening in now, her pencil tracing in mindless circles over the manuscript as she pretends to mark fingerings. Tracing over neat annotations already put there by precise hands, elegant fingers pencilling in every last fucking breath of the concerto because George plays music exactly the same *every time*. Dream wants to hash an eraser all over it. He doesn't, because the clock ticks closer and closer to nine. Until the minute hand snaps straight with metallic finality, signalling the end of this icy purgatory they've submerged themselves into.

His breath ghosts across George's neck as he leans in close to murmur to him. "And you don't deserve to be concertmaster, but money talks, doesn't it? Especially when it belongs to daddy."

It looks as if George wants to tip acid over his head.

They're ushered to begin the rehearsal before George can bite out a response, so Dream turns away and takes his place. He prepares to spend the next few hours working over and over Prokofiev by shaking the lingering ache of late nights holed up in a practice room from his muscles, fluttering his fingers over the strings to coax ghost notes from them.

And when the baton slices through the air, he steps away from his weary body and instead focuses on breathing the music. Dream changes, and the coals of hell blister underneath his feet.

He plays, and Cronus cowers before him.

Dream only registers the stingers lodged into his arms when they take a break. Time seems to slip around when he's playing violin, seems to wash away under his feet as sand does when he's standing at the edge of the lapping tide. It holds him in its sinkhole embrace, spits him out into an alternate dimension where the colours are brighter, the blood runs hotter, and the vultures caw louder, each one screaming angrily because this construction of steel and white hair disrupts their monotony with devil's notes. Stunningly horrifying. He channels it all into his bowing arm and fingerboard, vibrating with dissonant energy.

He snaps back into the worldly realm and tugs his headphones on, pacing towards the double doors with more coffee in mind, perhaps with syrup dripped over the insides of the cup this time to ward off the distinct taste of tarmac. In other words, Dream is a little whore for flavoured coffee, and he's not particularly apologetic about it. His muscles pluck up protests with every step. Morrissey whines at him when he steps into the downpour, heavier now than it was before, whipping through the streets in a flurry of grey willows. The skies have truly opened over the course of the rehearsal, pushing the rain sideways instead of vertically like it's supposed to be. It needles against his face. Cold claws whip through his hair.

Coffee doesn't sound so good anymore.

It's with a resigned dejectedness he trudges back into the rehearsal venue, making his way to the hall in defeat. Dream is growing sick of the damned double doors. They swing whenever he pushes

his palms against the wood instead of slamming with satisfying finality.

Only a few players remain in the hall, either practicing their parts or murmuring quietly amongst themselves, subdued conversations dulled by the tiring expanse of morning they've all clawed through together in some sort of sadistic shared experience. A few dedicated souls take their own music out, press fingers over silver keys or push air across reeds. Pluck at thick strings with the bows resting across their music stands or ricochet sticks off the top of glossy woodblocks.

George, of course, falls into the latter camp. Dream wonders if he ever takes the time to breathe.

He sits alone amongst a row of abandoned chairs, bottled water resting next to his case. Every facet of him is positioned with purpose, to the point Dream thinks he could be slapped into a learner's book straight alongside all the diagrams of proper posture. Right down to the arrangement of his moonstone features. They're constructed with unforgiving lines and luna curves, every plane of him hammered together with the mallet of cold apathy until Dream is left wondering whether he's looking at a person or a goddamn statue.

George is playing Ravel now, eyes flicking up at the music every now and again as if to double check he's *blinking* in the right places, and it infuriates Dream to no end, seeing him sit there with a carbon copy of the piece spilling from his violin. A tide of pure grey void. There's nothing special about it, nothing which makes it animate and jump off the page. Every note is metronomical, sounding without a single waver as George draws his bow again and again in precisely measured strokes, each one practised a thousand times over. It simply exists. Dream wishes he'd put a little purpose into that existence.

All things considered, it's not so surprising when Dream stalks towards his case, hands pulling at silk and velvet until he's walking up to George with his violin under his arm.

Midnight pupils flicker away from the music as he approaches, dark eyes which sour in record time like the very sight of Dream inseminates toxic fungus into his stomach. George sets his bow across the stand. The silence is fucking melodius to Dream's ears. He feels as if his brain's been rubbed raw with dull monotony and pencilled position shifts, each one absolutely conventional, expected, pedestrian.

"What do you want?" George asks in that accented lilt of his. "I'm trying to practise."

"Tzigane," Dream comments, cocking his head to one side. His violin fits under his chin, shoulders loosening in lazy circles as he shakes the stiffness from them. "You know, you're supposed to put a little more emotion into it, a fucking *scrap* of feeling. Perhaps like--"

George catches his wrist when he lifts the bow to the string, gripping tight with ice fingers. Lightning sparks across a still lake. "I don't need you, of all people, to tell me how to play it," he says darkly.

"I don't want to tell you how to play it. I want to give you an example of how to play it."

"What does that even mean?"

He plucks at his strings as if he's canoeing down a stream, legs crossed as river songs spill from his misshapen uke. It's just something to do with his hands, but it makes George frown, so he ensures to do it even louder. "It means," he says, strings twanging against the fingerboard. "You won't get anywhere playing imitations of pieces. Copying other people's emotion. You gotta *tell me a story* with it, tell me who the fuck you are."

"I suppose you think everyone cares about what you have to say, don't you? People don't want to know your story, they want to hear the music performed as it's supposed to be played. Not cheap sacrilege. And cut it out," he says, fingers darting up to rest upon Dream's so the violin falls silent. "You're not supposed to play it like that."

Laughter bubbles out of him, hysterical staccato. "You're telling me how I'm supposed to play my violin? You?"

"You're nothing special. You butcher the music until it's mistaken for art."

"Face it, George. I'm better than you."

"*You* make a mockery of everything you play."

"If that's true, then why am I the one playing this damned concerto? Why didn't they pick you to be the soloist? Riddle me that."

George seethes in silence, crossing and uncrossing his legs so the toes of his shoes glimmer with fluorescence. There's a ring set atop his case, and Dream doesn't need to lift it to the light to see the crest set into it, tiny swirls and engravings which whisper champagne and filth. Italian terracotta in empty villas, stained by tar.

"It's a condition of modernity," George says eventually. "People love to hate."

And despite how fucking pleased with himself he looks for coming up with that one, Dream thinks perhaps he's right. Hatred is delicious, hatred is exciting.

Hatred ties their bowing wrists together with bloody string.

Dream lies on his covers, ankles crossed over one another.

Starlight filters through the window while the speaker on his nightstand kicks out Courtney Love in shades of amethyst. He should be practising, or knocked out cold, if not dead. Instead he lies in damp jeans with a head full of pale skin, of midnight snow and knuckles flexing against mahogany. Steak knives sliding over flesh, curved bows sawing against steel strings.

He had hated George from the very moment he'd walked into his life, wrapped in blue blood and red apathy. The stars whipped into a frenzy, spelling out fire hotter than hell and ice chipped from arctic glaciers. They were at a competition, so perhaps it shouldn't have been surprising that they'd convulse and dislocate with bitter rivalry.

"I'm Dream," he said, reaching out a hand.

George's fingers were freezing against his own, gripped too softly like Dream would shatter

otherwise. He hated it. He hated people looking at him as though he were in a display case, as though the clouds parted one day and set him on the earth with a violin in hand. His gift was best cultivated, grown over years of tears onto wood and bruises flowering over his neck. Sweat dripping from his temples. Blood pooling at his fingertips whenever the strings rubbed them raw, splinters between every vertebrae of his spine because he spent so much time holding it straight.

And besides, he'd always been more of a devil's violinist. Birthed from cleaved earth and fiery imperfection.

"George," he said, and even his voice irritated Dream. It was hushed, pitched down as though he stood in the middle of a cathedral and repulsed the echo. Syllables measured to perfection, tight and angular without the slightest molecule of emotion to permeate them. Stained glass casting his face to sombre blues.

Dream didn't speak to George for any longer than he had to.

That evening, he took the oyster shell that was George, and smashed it against cliff stone, battered it in the hopes it'd crack. He was certain the pearl would be perfectly baroque, boring, blending into the soft shell of tongue it was conceived upon.

He'd met Sarnap at a junior competition. Dream made the final round, Sarnap didn't. His string broke during one of his pieces, and instead of lowering himself into a pit of self hatred, perhaps running from the stage and crying himself to sleep over it for the next five years, Sarnap simply burst out laughing in front of an auditorium full of music snobs. They'd been friends ever since.

Point being, Sarnap kept his ear to the ground, grapevines wrapped around his limbs. Whenever Dream needed to know something, Sarnap usually had the answer, wrapped in chardonnay and barbed wire. It wasn't anomalous that he found himself sitting on Sarnap's bed in the middle of Oslo that evening, head brimming with questions about the pretty violinist who moved in shades of candor and spoke as if his words were numbered.

"Who the fuck loaned that to *him*?" he asked about George's instrument, surroundings tinted green green. Clovers sprouting between his toes. Why weren't people loaning Dream violins like that?

Sarnap looked up over the top of his gameboy, thumbs stilling as he rooted around in his head for the info, mining for potted gold. It was extracted by iron teeth in a matter of heartbeats. "Nah dude, it's like, his."

"He owns that thing?"

"Yep."

"How the fuck does he have a *strad*?"

The gameboy recaptured Sarnap's attention. "The usual. Little darlings and daddy's money. Tutoring at the R.A.M since he could walk, and the like," he said with a shrug, disinterested.

That made sense. Too much honing would wear down any blade, reduce the wicked gleam of it until all the burrs snapped clean. George was created in golden halls underneath frescoed ceilings, wrists pulled to be vaulted arches and fingers strengthened to marble, features schooled to reflect nothing about what was going on in his mind, nothing more than what the music *wanted* him to output. Too poised, too perfect. There wasn't a single flaw in his posture when he was playing, and that was the worst part about it. Dream was utterly bored by him.

“Doesn’t matter. I play better than he ever will.”

Sapnap laughed dryly. “I can never tell if you’re a textbook leo or a massive dickhead.”

He thought about that one for a moment, eyes trained on the ceiling. “Both, probably. But I play well, so I’m allowed to say it.”

“Dunno if that’s the right way to put it. You play interesting, for sure.”

“I play interesting,” he parroted. “I like that. I’d rather play every note sharp, snap the bridge, throw the violin to the floor and douse it in gasoline than play *boring*. That’s the death of a violinist.”

“You’d throw a match at it too?”

A smile slipped onto his face. “‘course I would. Give them a little heat, right?”

Dream knew the best way to ruin a pearl was to run a blowtorch over it.

He made the final round despite being a sixteen year old amongst a crowd of young adults. Not that it mattered. There were others his age, other prodigies that walked in stride with him, but his presence alone seemed to make George bristle. Like he was personally offended Dream commanded the winds and the rains with his violin, like he reviled the way the ground cracked in two whenever Dream lifted his bow from the strings. Flies swarming around him.

Everyone else seemed to know each other, and Dream guessed they did. They’d had years of seeing each other all the damn time, their little exclusive club of signet rings and family crests. Dream had to be picky with the comps he attended—his mom could afford to take him to the fucking Menuhin biennially, but he couldn’t be flying transnationally every few weeks without someone funding his efforts. He felt like an outlier, surviving on a fraction of the tutoring the rest of his competition received. Most of them would’ve been at it since they could fucking walk, provided with silver spoons and expensive violin tutelage.

It didn't matter. He fucking earnt his right to have a world class tutor.

George also made the final round, the thorn in his side.

He was talking to one of the other violinists while they waited for a rehearsal to start—a french girl, chin tipping into his hand every time he laughed. Dream couldn’t hope to understand what they were saying, even if they weren’t speaking in hushed tones as if to conceal their conversation from the few other competitors milling about. But he *could* understand the way they glanced over at him every now again, two sets of eyes both forged in the blue fires of decorum.

And he would’ve tried to ignore them, except he’d been attempting to access the venue’s wifi for a solid twenty minutes with no luck, and his head was tipping around and around in lacklustre circles. It wasn’t as if he had anything better to do than listen in to their conversation. His fingers tapped erratically against his thighs. Dream was bored out of his mind, and so it really wasn’t surprising when he tilted his head to one side just as George muttered something along the lines of “...quel imbécile.”

Well. He didn't need to know french to understand that one.

They smiled at him with poorly masked distaste when he stood up, reaching for his violin case

with one hand and his phone with the other. Dream wasn't about to sit there while they talked shit about him. He'd come back in time for the start of the rehearsal. Probably.

The streets of Oslo accepted him with biting sunshine when he tumbled free of the venue, whispers of fjords and harbours washing over his skin to cleanse the lingering feeling of disgust.

When he performed in the final, the notes came up dripping with bile, every tremor of his fingers visceral and bloody. He was met with an auditorium of awed eyes, shocked faces, mouths downturned into grimaces. Dream commanded a fleet of crows around him. A dark writhing mass of beautiful horror. This was why he dealt with blue veins and crested rings, this was why he shook cold hands and walked into a cloud of insults he couldn't understand—because he loved to play violin, command the music until it knelt at his feet.

He smiled when he tore his bow from the strings. Thorns ringed his head. Nails prodded his soles.

Nobody clapped for what felt like two millennia, because it's not right to applaud an obituary.

Dream didn't win that competition. But he placed well ahead of George, and that was all that mattered. The stone rolled over his tomb, condemning him to a life of being subpar, second best to Dream in their glass bubble of a conservatoire.

"I won the audience prize too, you know," he said the last time he'd see George for the next few years. He would be too old for the senior division soon, too focused on school to fly out to Beijing for the next Menuhin. Or perhaps he just never wanted to see Dream's smile again. "I guess they really liked me."

Dark hurt, simmering in a tranquil november sea. Watery graves upturned to train upon Dream's face, roiling tides of pain and arctic bluster crashing over George's skin as he clenched his fists in restrained annoyance. That George was younger, closer to his home of clean floors and glass walled music rooms. Or one of them, anyway. "I guess they did," he said, and the politeness of it made Dream want to empty acidic bile all over the atrium. "Congratulations, Dream."

A pale nape shone at him, moonlike, when George walked away, narrow shoulders moving in spectral motions because he seemed to drift rather than tread. He floated away over the atlantic, only to resurface, covered in tarragon, when Dream walked through Juilliard's front doors two years later.

Demons don't stay drowned for long.

This George is a very different person to the polite eighteen year old Dream remembers.

This George isn't afraid to glare at him, isn't afraid to talk shit to his face, in *English*. Thousands of miles of sea have weathered him, filled the cliff caves in his heart with brine and brimstone. And Dream thinks George could take all his demure distaste and shove it up his fucking ass, turn it into something useful, but instead he chooses to display it through curled upper lips and wrinkled noses whenever Dream so much as breathes in the direction of a violin. He wishes George would just fucking hash at the music with all that dark fury, make it unique and beautiful. The ice prince

bullshit is becoming tiresome.

His clothes fall into a heap upon the floor, crumpled so badly he's certain they'll be creased in the morning. He doesn't care. The bed welcomes him with powdered linen, pale sheets, blankets that barely smell of home, of sunshine and humidity.

He dreams of snapped bows, splintering bones, snow teeth, snake tones.

He's pacing through the corridors when the pot boils over.

Dream exits his soundproof cage when the world of hellfire and blood begins to drift away from him, slipping through his fingers in a rush of sink sand and honey. It's no use trying to play when the weight of the week presses upon his shoulders, days and days of slaving over the concerto until he's got the technique down. Dream knows when to quit. There's only so far practise can get him before he needs to dip his mind in a salt bath, rejuvenate his neural passages with dark red so he can wake at sunrise and do it all again.

As he's slumbering towards the exit, feet dragging with weariness, Dream hears Prokofiev filtering down the corridor. It's the concerto, played with pencilled precision and paper perfection.

The source of the music is a practice room door, cracked open as if someone's shut it with gentle hands when it really needs a good slam for the latch to click into place. Due to the opening, sound pours out into the deserted hallway. And even though Dream is fucking tired of this damned concerto after hacking away at it for hours and hours, he leans against the wall, arms crossed, devil stance.

He knows exactly who plays like this, with measured bow strokes and rhythmic fingers. He also knows George holes up in practice rooms for far longer than is healthy, with a red mark permanently stamped onto his neck.

The sound breaks off into nothing, the bow lifted from the string and placed down onto cushioned velvet. A coffin, a black box of silent whispers where music goes to die and decay. Contained by shining clasps. Dream wants more than anything to paint over the surface of George's case, to spill a rainbow of colour over the lid and smudge it all together in beautiful abstractionism. He would despise it.

"That—I hate how he phrases that. It's all wrong, he's making a mockery of it," he hears George say, hears his desk partner hum in agreement.

Dream quirks an eyebrow.

He can't say he's surprised George is here in the late hours of the evening just to poke and prod at his playing, pretend he can do any better. The music starts up again in short bursts, odd excerpts Dream spins with phoenix fingers until they're made into his own—beautiful, unique. Apparently George isn't quite as enamoured with his interpretations, because he rehashes the music the same

way every soloist before him has played it, prim and proper. Dream stifles a yawn.

When George completes a run with the same motions as Diamantaire exacts glimmering facets into precious stones, the vice leader speaks, her voice just as soft and subdued as George's. They make a good pair, Dream thinks.

"I'm going to go to bed, I think. I'm exhausted," she says, faintly European.

George hums under his breath, accompanying the rustle of manuscript. "Alright. I'll probably stay a while longer, there are some runs I could polish a little more." There's always *polishing* for George to do. He's a stonecutter, honing diamonds until they reflect light exactly as they're expected to.

"Don't work yourself to death, George."

"I won't. Goodnight."

Dream doesn't bother acting like he's not eavesdropping when the vice leader emerges from the room, fingers struggling with the elastic securing her hair into a taut ponytail. She stills when she catches sight of him leaning against the wall, Lucifer reincarnate. Hornets at his shoulders.

"I—"

He jerks his chin towards the end of the corridor, signalling she should head home. Dream is intimidating when he wants to be, sunshine when he doesn't. It works well for him, because he's got half the student body whispering behind cupped hands, clamouring for his attention, and the other half skittering down empty corridors in the dead of night. The only outlier is George, who'd probably pay to see him dead.

Pale gold glimmers across the vice leader's face when she turns away, the curve of her nose illuminated by flickering strip lights. Sometimes being devilspawn really does have its benefits, he thinks as she hurries off towards the exit. Her violin case bumps against her back in even measures. After a few more moments of struggle, the hair tie finally comes free, and her nape is obscured by a strawberry curtain.

George seems to be waiting for him when he shoves his way through the door. "Well?" He says, enunciating even the most throwaway of syllables with utmost care. The door clicks shut.

"You don't like my rendition of the concerto," he says, lip sticking out in faux dejection.

"No."

"Why?" he asks, just because it's so *fun* to dance in the fire.

"Well, I don't have all night," George says simply, papillon fingers rifling through yellowed sheet music so the concerto vanishes to a stack of staves.

Dream flexes his fingers, eyeing George's nape. He floats like the moon across the sky, as even as the cadence of lunar phases—measured by the thrum of his own saccharine nature, mathematically formulated in his tutor-worn brain. "You had enough time to pick apart my playing," he says, petroleum fires. "You had enough time to sit here and play the concerto even though you weren't the one chosen to perform it, you had enough time to play pretend-soloist."

"I was practising. Some of us know better than to show up to rehearsal without adequate preparation."

He laughs in disbelief. “You really think I don’t bleed on that fucking fingerboard just like everyone else? The hell do you think I’m doing in college, at—” he swipes at his phone— “ten minutes to midnight?”

“Beats me. I can’t imagine what you do here, when you can’t even play the notes right.”

“I suppose you think you’re better than me.”

George runs his fingers over his violin where it rests upon plush velvet, silks embroidered with sakura draped over it to give the thing an air of conundrum. “I am better than you. My technique is perfect, I perform everything correctly. As written, as intended.”

“It’s boring.”

“It’s *humble*. You walk over graves for the fun of it.”

Dream smiles genuinely at that, lips tilting upwards to expose sharp canines. He’s sure he makes composers turn in their fucking graves, roll over in coffins or peasant ditches with horror at what he does to their masterpieces. Let them turn, he thinks. Let the dead dance, let their bones climb right out of the ground in all their Saint-Saëns glory. Gruesome, macabre waltzes reserved for witching hour.

The clock ticks and ticks.

When he speaks, it resounds like the devil’s tritone. "You're getting ideas above your station. Know your place, little concertmaster."

"My apologies, *virtuoso*." George spits *virtuoso* like he might spit *vermin*, like he might spit *mutt* or *cockroach*.

Blight, scourge, devil. Dream walks the earth to spin his hellish cacophonies, to saw hair and steel until pretty people like George crumple their pretty noses in disgust.

“That’s right. Because I’m the genius, and *you* will never stand up from first chair.”

He grasps at George’s bowing wrist, demonstrating how easily his fingers wrap around it. How easily he could snap it like splintering wood, how easily he could ensure George never plays another pinpoint note again. His violin would fall silent, desolate. Somehow, it would be far more beautiful than anything he could ever do to it of his own volition.

George flinches, but he doesn’t withdraw. His gaze burns against melding skin, gold to cream to wolfsbane to drifting wisteria. “You can’t touch me,” he murmurs, stable and flat. “You know you can’t.”

“Oh, because you have *influence*? Because you have sway in this wretched world?”

A careful nod, barely an incline of his chin.

He crowds up against George, imposing because he’s so much bigger. "I'll break you right along with your daddy's money strad, George. Believe me, I'll snap you in half."

“You can try,” George says, but it comes out breathy, dragged along the seabed and hauled up covered in coral. He’s glowing pink as he looks up at Dream, narrow shoulders and slender wrists so delectably breakable under the force of rough hands.

Dream is dizzy when he realises George is hard, shuffling around awkwardly as he tries to conceal it. His cheeks are warm, betraying his iced eyes with obvious arousal. *What am I going to do with you?* he thinks, because George's lips are pressed together in exasperation as battle rages within the darkest corners of his mind. He wonders if George is attending a mental confessional, whispering through a grille as he tries desperately to purge the thought of Dream from his mind. Dirty, dirty, dirty.

"Is this some rich boy kick of yours, concertmaster?" he teases.

"I- what?" George blinks and blinks, lips parted and pupils blown.

"You're *so* into this," he murmurs, running a thumb over pallid skin. "You want to be taken apart, don't you? You want me to ruin you like I ruin the music, you wanna feel that sacrilege spilled into your fucking throat. I'll give it to you, don't worry. Perhaps it'll make you learn something for once. Kneel for me, kneel for your virtuoso."

"Why should I?" Defiance flares.

Dream's stomach bubbles acid.

"Because I'm right. Because you're aching right now, because you're *curious*." Desperate for a taste of sin, of white hot blasphemy. "You'll let me fuck your throat, or I leave you with nothing. I'll walk right out of here, the clock's ticking. Cemetery hour is coming."

And with his head bowed in shame, George descends to the floor.

"This isn't victory, or anything," he says, lifting his gaze to Dream. "Just because I'm doing this, it doesn't mean I hate you any less."

"Shared sentiment," Dream hums, running feather touches over freezing skin.

Fabric whispers when he frees his hardness, flushed red enough to hurt. George watches it with a facade of disinterest, but Dream can see the fascination shining beneath his dark pool of loathing. The edges are honed against whetstones, absolutely delightful. Dream wishes he'd look at his music like that, with dangerous needle tips dripping plasma all over the Pietra tiles lining his mind.

"I've seen better," George has the gall to mutter.

"So have I."

His cock is heavy against the seam of George's lips, stringing pink and scarlet together with spider silk. Gossamer glimmering in the moonlight, a picture of immorality. He groans when George's tongue presses flat against the head, lapping at the slit so coily it makes Dream see in shades of blood. An urge to wrap his hands around George's neck and squeeze slams into the forefront of his mind, a tidal wave of destruction and loving violence.

"I can still walk away," he warns, bitter grapefruit. Dream isn't in the mood for George's spineless maneuvers, his chess board actions and predictable utterances.

Twilight lashes flutter over curved cheekbones, coquettish and infuriating. "Really? I don't think you want to," George says, mouthing up the side of his cock. His teeth whisper against the skin, a gentle pressure to remind them both this isn't delicate, this isn't beautiful, this isn't heavenborn. This is forged in blue fire, in leather and marrow.

"Don't I?" He doesn't like how self-confident George looks. He wants to make him scream, wants

to make him wail siren song to the night, trapped in their soundproof room.

George sucks at the tip for a moment before releasing, rows of straight teeth all lined up in pillbox lips. It drives Dream halfway to madness. "You're so hard," he says, pouting in such a way that's supposed to be mocking. He reeks of orris and myrrh, fingers whispering with old money. "You're so hard for me, virtuoso. Do you think I'm pretty?"

"No."

"Really? Because you're barely able to contain yourself just *looking* at me."

George talks far too much, Dream decides. His resolve stiffens like the rest of him, delirious with the force of a million stars collapsing over their heads. The black hole tugs at a part of him, urging him further and further until he's pressing against George's jaw to open him up. A night flower, corpse blossom, pale and lucid and polar. Petal tongue glittering with moonlight, starving for the weight of Dream's cock pressing it towards magma and iron.

It's blistering when George takes him in, descending down his length as an angel floats to earth. Except his wings are plucked and bloody, his bones are made of ivory, and his face is chiselled from dull marble. Dream's never liked sculptures, never liked the unmoving nature of them. And George is statuesque, so maybe that's why he despises him.

Dream thinks in another life he could even enjoy the feeling of George's tongue pressing against the underside of his cock, could appreciate the moonlight tumbles over his features, across the curve of his nose. But everything is vignettted with seething dislike, ruined by the memory of George's hands upon his stupidly expensive instrument. George presses around him, and he can't bring himself to enjoy it. Not when he's so reticent.

He shudders when the warmth turns sharp, when uncomfortable electricity sings the lining of his stomach. And George seems to know what he's doing, the corners of his lips light with self satisfaction, a persian with dove blood all over its maw. Cream reflecting in its eyes, back arching in contentment.

That won't do.

"Mind your fucking teeth," he growls.

George's teeth scrape along the length of his cock with renewed vigour, bolts of frantic electricity needling over his navel with every drag of knife edge canines.

He reaches all his fingers into George's hair and *pulls*, pulls so hard it's a wonder nothing comes loose. George's eyes roll up as he's yanked off Dream's cock, mouth shining with wetness and jaw hanging open uselessly like he can't remember how to close it. Satisfaction curls in his gut because George looks downright pathetic like this, drooling over the cock of a man he claims to hate. He's starving for it, starving for the taste of Dream's release dripping all over his tongue.

His thumb nudges up into George's chin to help him out, pushing his mouth closed in one easy motion. Soft, pliable.

"I said, *mind your fucking teeth*."

His palm cracks across George's cheek, the sound of it reverberating with terrifying volume.

Earth covers with rain, a pale jaw trembles. Hot red blooms over the side of George's face, angry and boiling to the touch. He ghosts his fingers over it in disbelief, hands shaking as he shifts around

on the floor. Dream is sure his knees are bruising. He revels in it—he wants George to walk out of here covered in imperfections, marked up by bruises and swollen lips and a face slapped so red the vessels burst.

“Did you just *slap* me?” Pale fingers run over blossoming scarlet.

George gasps when Dream grabs at his hair again, whole fistfuls clutched in an unrelenting grip. A chin forced skywards, forced to look at his virtuoso even through the layer of tears swimming atop his vision. Monkshood pleasure coils tight at the bottom of his lungs because George looks awful like this, with his porcelain cracking around the edges, with his fingers trailing empty through the air, reaching for Dream. Pathetically loose, weak-wristed, desperate.

“Did you forget already?” He asks, softly sarcastic. “Do you need me to remind you?”

He’s met with eyes full of icy rage as he slaps George, hard enough he’s rewarded by his head snapping to the side, angry pink webbing out across abused skin. Lily fingers cradling the blood blossom. Lips falling open in shock, a secretive hand snaking downwards to palm at the tightness forming in his pants.

“Fuck you,” George spits, blistering and arctic in sweet juxtaposition.

“Oh, but you liked it, didn't you?”

“No.”

Dream hums in amusement. “You’re touching yourself, George. You get off on being slapped, don’t you? Does it happen when your intonation’s all sharp, when you can’t count properly, when you get the bowing wrong-”

“Shut up,” George whispers, low, dangerous. His hands fall open in his lap, palms empty. “You don’t know anything.”

Nail on the head.

His thumbs replace pale fingers, rubbing back and forth over flaring cheeks. It’s hot under his hands, burning against his skin. George looks interesting like this, with his perfect face marred by angry red, with his placating eyes full of hatred, with a jaw locked in place as he glares up at Dream. He wonders if George would sob if he edged him, if he’d scream and wail if he ran his hands along his cock over and over and over, pulling away each time just as his frenzy reached its peak. He wonders if he could break George. Better yet, he wonders *how much* it would take to break George.

He’s determined to find out.

“Open up,” he commands, tugging George’s head back. He’s rewarded with rose lips pressing against him, a tongue darting over the head of his cock in delicate motions. It’s infuriating. George sucks at his tip as if they’ve got until the universe shrinks, until all the stars flicker out and leave them stumbling around in the dark. “Don’t fucking tease,” he says, cradling a hand against a cold nape.

George glares up at him when he sinks down, angry hatred sparking at the pit of his soul. His eyes only flutter when Dream nudges against the back of his throat, when the cavity of his mouth is full with hot skin and throbbing cock.

“You’re so much prettier like this,” he says, muttering a curse when George’s cheeks hollow, when

he drags swollen lips over his aching hardness. “You’re so mouthy, it’s nice to shut you up once in a while.”

He snaps his hips, and George gags around him. It makes him want to do it again. His fingers curl against George’s scalp, a threat of more, a threat of yanking at him as roughly as he plays violin, as violently as he whips up an outpouring of emotion. “I’m gonna fuck your throat, alright?” The register of his voice makes George keen, back arching in a crescent moon as he pulls closer to Dream, already so fucked out and useless. “Gonna make sure you can’t speak right, gonna make sure your mouth feels too fucking big when I’m done with you. Because it is.”

The column of George’s throat flexes and swells when he fucks into him, using his mouth as though he’s nothing more than a pretty toy, head full of clouds and eyes full of rain. They roll back whenever he pushes particularly hard, whenever he knocks against hot flesh, whenever George gags. It feels good. George kneels for him, put back in his place by barbed hands and rough horns.

George worships sin.

Something coils at the bottom of his stomach, fed by the sick pleasure he obtains from seeing George wrecked like this. Used for his hedonism, tongue begging to be stained in dirty release. Tighter and tighter, accelerated by the flash of teeth dragging against his length.

He groans when he cums, waves and waves of sinful white crashing down over him. Seafoam and froth, bubbling in the pit of his stomach as he brands the back of George’s throat, as he pulls at dark hair to watch his eyes roll up. His cock twitches against George’s tongue, pulsing until he’s spent, until the foam curdles to crude oil.

George’s jaw hangs open when he pulls out. His lips are ruined, bright cherry slick with saliva.

His zipper breaks the silence when he tugs it back up, an interlude to George’s heavy breathing. Dream steps away, straightening his shirt where the hem’s been knocked askew. They’re only observed by the lonely night, miles and miles of urban ennui pressing against the window, millions of uncaring eyes oblivious to the ritual they’ve just performed. The stars wink in solitude. He reaches for his jacket with a steady grip.

“Don’t you even have the decency to return the favour?” George is seething, hands braced either side of him as he rubs his thighs together. He looks dreadful, with fucked lips and a voice sounding as if it’s been dragged over miles and miles of barbed wire no man’s land, hazy eyes because he can undoubtedly still taste Dream on his tongue, painting the back of his palette with hot white. Dried tear tracks carving his cheeks.

Dream shrugs, pulling his jacket back on in a kaleidoscope of colour due to the collection of patches stitched atop the light wash. “I don’t waste my time with trust fund babies.”

“But you’d waste your time putting your cock in my mouth?”

He leans forward to graze his teeth along George’s cheek, a poor imitation of a kiss. Thorned, sharp. “You’re a pretty fucktoy, I’ll give you that. And now you can fuck yourself.”

“I fucking hate you,” George whines, fucking up into his palm even as Dream gazes down at him in admonishment. His hips stutter every now and again, neat thrusts which seem far too unsatisfactory. Perhaps if George laid aside all his abandon and moaned whorishly for him, Dream would stay, would kneel beside him and wrap a hand around his drooling cock, drag a hot palm all over him, stick two fingers into his mouth so he has something to keep him quiet.

But as it is, George remains cold and uninviting. Dream retrieves his violin case with nothing but apathy, an unimpressed gaze falling back to red lips as they fall open in a silent gasp. Nothing about this excites him, electrifies his interest with sweet craving for *more*, dark desire to see George spill and bloom for him. His pulse stagnates. The metronome falls still.

“Mutual sentiment.”

A lapse, and the door slams behind him.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

i'm warring with ao3 rn so if this is off anon or there's a duplicate chapter then. fuck me i guess

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream will never grow tired of how a violin looks in the early morning, pulled from its case in the middle of a practise room with the sun dutifully crawling across the sky. The city bustles outside. Sparrows unleash their anger to deaf clouds. He pushes aside velveteen covers, freeing dark wood so he can spend the next few hours mauling himself half to death upon guillotine strings.

But nothing in his life seems to run smoothly at the moment. The stars like to stick their noses into the corridors, rearrange their layout until a George-shaped blight is destined to come running back to stain his existence just when he thinks he's managed to shake him.

Cautious knuckles tap against the door while Dream's got a shoulder rest clutched in his hand, delicate, measured, resounding with the shrill of silver against a champagne glass. Irritation sparks in the pit of his stomach. He has shit to do, pages upon pages of music scrolling along the insides of his goddamn mind because he's burnt it into the lining of his neural passages with black ink and linear staves.

So instead of opening it, Dream waits with an eyebrow cocked. The tip of his bow makes lazy infinities in the air. It's just so *fun* to watch unexpected Juilliard students balk at the sight of him, hurry around as if he'll step on them should they breathe too loudly. Knock them down a few pegs when they realise the scholarship kid is better than they'll ever be, spins effortless beauty with his nothing-special background and his nothing-special violin, heaven born hands and hell born vision.

Okay. So maybe Dream's sort of a dickhead.

The door swings open. "...so sorry, I left- oh." George stills in the doorway, shoulders drawn into a tense curve. His tone drops its sweet edges, its candied peal and crystalline demerara. "Don't you know how to answer?" he says, bristling around the edges.

"What did you leave?" Dream asks instead, lips curling with amusement. George doesn't seem like the kind of person who forgets his belongings, discards them in a darkened practice room and hurries around with his brain all scattered. Unless, of course, he's had the soul fucked out of him, coherency tipped down the drain in a torrent of bleach and aluminium. Perhaps that'd make him slip up, rush into the clutches of New York with his clothes all crumpled. Lips ruined, hair tugged to chaos.

George lets himself into the room without so much as a second glance at Dream, crossing over to where a folder of sheet music rests on the table. His hands curl around it with annoying delicateness. "This," he says.

"You left your music."

"Intelligent observation."

A smile blooms deep inside of him, clawing its way up the soft lining of his throat until he's exuding satisfaction, warm and sickly and addictive. It's edged with a certain meanness, a dangerous blade in the form of revealed canines and wicked envy eyes. "Were your thoughts a little vacant last night, concertmaster? What did you *do* to yourself in here, hmm? I doubt it was a picture of purity."

"I need to practise," George says simply.

"Wait." His grip is hot around a narrow wrist when he stops George from leaving, tugging him close before he has the opportunity to disappear into the intestinal mess of corridors. He releases when George blinks up at him, empty empty empty.

"What do you want?"

"I was just about to play pag 24, actually—you know, to *warm up*," he says, fingers fluttering over the strings where he clutches at his violin with a lazy grip. Plucky notes spill from it, contained by the pads of his fingers. "You can listen, if you like. I'm sure it'll impress you."

He's rewarded with eyes rolled skywards. "You're no Heifetz."

"I know. I'm better."

"You're better? Sounds like you're overcompensating for something."

Dream shrugs before leaning down to press his lips closer, closer, closer. Until George's skin erupts with flesh freckles, betraying his sense of magnetisation as Dream blows words over his neck. "You've seen my cock. You've gagged on my cock, you've had it shoved in the back of your throat until you couldn't fucking *breathe* with those expensive lungs of yours. So tell me, concertmaster, do you think I'm *overcompensating*?"

Frost settles upon the ground between them, churning out of a sampo with all the vigour of a hunched witch pulling the millstones. And despite the biting cold, Dream wishes he'd feel hot coals beneath his feet instead. Wishes George would snap, would rise to the challenge so his face glows red. He could take him apart piece by piece regardless, smack a steady hand all over salt-toned skin for every perfect, uninteresting note George has ever played in his life. Until he's writhing, broken. Put back in his place to kneel at the feet of a sinner, feet which step upon headstones and dance between granite mausoleums.

"Just play the caprice," George sighs, pulling himself up onto the table next to Dream's abandoned violin case.

"Really?"

"I'm waiting." He waves an impatient hand, balancing his chin atop one of his knees.

Anticipation bubbles in Dream's stomach when he knocks the violin under his jaw, languid and lazy because even when he's asleep, the gloomy stretch of the fingerboard haunts his every nightmare. Screaming daemons, dark spectres with sound hole skulls. Figures with the flesh melted right off their bones, brandishing instruments blackened by ammonia as they drift through his dreams. Dream never truly leaves his realm of guttural music, not even when night falls.

The bow rests over the strings, and it flickers like an oar through angry rivers.

Ebony eyes study his every movement, the arc of his fingers, the line of his wrist, the curve of his eyelashes as his lids fall shut. His feet as he steps into his rowboat, unmooring from the living

world of upright steel, concrete jungle, pale pretty boys with crystal blocking their aortas.

Dream breathes, and breathes, and allows the Cocytus to fill up his lungs with black water.

He doesn't open his eyes until he's done, and when he does, he wishes he hadn't bothered.

George picks at his nails, perfect crescents of peony blossoming from his fingers, petal lips downturned in disinterest. Nothing about his stature changes when the last note dissipates, destined to die a death of silence because Dream is the only one who cares enough to listen to its descent. He tips his head to one side like every one of his expectations have been met, mapped out precisely by platinum adorned hands.

It's not until he's standing, pulling his violin case onto his back, that Dream snaps.

"Fucking say something."

"You want to know what I thought?" George asks. His tone rings mocking around the edges, bottom lip pushing out like Dream is a child to be scolded. Like he's another student with dreams to break, desires to be dashed against the sidewalk without so much as a second thought.

"Yes."

"I hated it."

The door bangs shut behind George's lithe form.

Dream stands there in the middle of the room, violin tucked under his arm and hatred brewing in his stomach.

He wishes George hated it enough to scream and kick at him, wishes he despised it enough to grab at Dream and send wood splintering all over the floor. To snap his bow in half, to yank at the strings with perfect teeth until something gives. Chipped calcium falling from his lips, blood swirling over pink gums as he turns from the violin to *Dream*. Hands tearing at his clothes, open palms falling across swathes of unmarked skin and teeth scraping along the length of his cock. Dark eyes rolling back as he thrusts harder, as he pounds into George so violently he forgets how to fucking walk.

Instead he'd been met with cold disinterest, sharp and blustery. George's features poised to perfection, flat lips and dark eyes full of void matter, brimming with nothing in particular even though Dream had just poured his soul out. The sound of a door slamming in staccato finality.

I hated it.

Dream wishes he'd really meant it.

Rehearsals flit by in a weary cadence, each one bleeding into the next. The orchestra shies away

from him, he steps on the first violins, and the balance is never quite struck. He plays the concerto over and over, but it seizes around the edges, constrained by the up down up down of the baton, chained by rehearsal hall walls and George's annoying tendency to drag him out of hell. His back might as well have snowflakes permanently stuck to it at this point, the coldness of George's presence seeping into the ridges of his vertebrae every time he attends rehearsal.

Saturday morning falls. He's exhausted, brain worn to a bloody pulp by Prokofiev.

Dream is perfectly content with shuffling around his cramped studio, coffee in tow, but George chooses this moment to shoot a text to his phone. They'd exchanged numbers once the maestro grew increasingly frustrated with their ability to coordinate, two sets of thumbs tapping away in opposite degrees of enthusiasm. Dream thought it was hilarious, George didn't. The screen lights up, offensively clinical in the grey light of morning.

Give me your address. Need to practise concerto.

Dream almost laughs at his fucking phone. A part of him mourns the loss of his afternoon, cast out into the rain before it even began. He sets the cup down as he scrambles to type a response because George is right, they really should be practising the damn concerto.

lolllll wouldnt practise room b better?? soundproof ;)

When George doesn't respond, Dream sighs with amusement and attaches his address to the message. Every day he thanks the heavens for giving him the most ridiculous scholarship to this stupid school, effectively ensuring he can just about struggle by with a shitty studio to himself. Uninterrupted.

here u go ;) for the 'concerto'

He looks down at his attire, neckline stretched to reveal his collarbones and the decal flaking off in powdery snow bursts. Weariness crashes over him, a blizzard numbing his shoulders with waking aches and playing pains.

With his volitionally limited knowledge of George, Dream concludes he doesn't have long before he appears on his doorstep, thrown up by the churning gut of New York with rain streaking over his expression and storm clouds crackling at his temples. His lips curling as he eyes Dream, slumming around at eleven in the morning when he really should've been mauling his fingers to bloody pulps since daybreak. The ice of the image makes his arteries sing arctic song.

He should probably shower.

Dream has to summon every last scrap of his willpower to get off his ass and buzz George through the main doors when he shows up outside the building. His hair drips onto his shoulders, a problem he half-assedly solves by rubbing a towel over his scalp while he waits for George to navigate the dinge of the stairwell.

Within five minutes, he's standing just past the threshold of the studio, slender hands tucked deep into his pockets and a lemon slice sitting upon his tongue. He stares up at Dream with unmasked distaste because he's never been put in check, never been taught to smile politely for anyone unless they wrestle the currents of the world with both hands and carry coffers full of gold. And because Dream has roughly three dollars of discretionary income to his name, George doesn't make an effort to charm him with saccharine smiles and sly sweetness.

It's sort of refreshing.

"Good morning," he says, and it echoes as if off the walls of a rehearsal hall.

"Barely." George assesses the damp ends of his hair, the sleep clinging to his face and the weary set of his shoulders. "You haven't played yet today, have you?"

"Nope." He opens the door wider so George can glide through the entrance, hands tugging the violin case off his back. Dark eyes flit around the room, noting the dirty laundry shoved into the corner, the cold mug of coffee set on the windowsill, the Soundgarden poster falling off the wall over his bed. Dream hopes he's regretting his decision to forgo the practise room.

The case is set against the wall. George heaves an exhale, dredged up from the recesses of his soul and dripping with curdled exasperation. "It's eleven, Dream."

"And? It's Saturday, chill the fuck out."

"And we're performing the concerto in *two weeks*."

"I can already play it."

"Well, I wouldn't say that." George is openly nosing around his room now, like he's an exhibition in the Guggenheim. His discarded shoes watch from the doorway as he trails ghost fingers over Dream's desk, past the mess of manuscript and theory books, around the biro sitting in a pool of dried ink, across the stickered lid of his laptop. Dream isn't sure whether he's impressed by George's lack of shame or not. It's not until George reaches for his shelf he decides to put an end to it.

"Are you gonna get your violin out or not?" He asks, an eyebrow tipped. "It sort of looks like you're wasting my Saturday."

"Your desk is a state," George says as he shrugs his coat off. It's dappled with gentle drizzle, the sort of rain so intangible Dream only knows it's there because he's unceremoniously given the damn thing by entitled hands. "Can you hang this?"

Dream is really quite tempted to throw it at the back of George's head when he kneels to pop the latches on his violin case, tightening the bow in practised motions and fitting the shoulder rest onto the back of the instrument. He sets it back in the case when he's done, straightening up with a stack of music clutched in his hands and a pencil between his teeth. His stupid, baroque teeth. Before the urge to rearrange them swells with the intensity of an orchestra in the throes of crescendo, Dream saunters across the room like he's waiting for the sun to expand and burn the earth to a crisp.

"*Into the flood again*," he mumbles under his breath, slinging George's coat onto the skewed hook mounted on his door. It's weighty in the way that polyester and acrylic isn't, soft lining and gleaming metalware all stitched together by attentive hands. Next to his jean jacket and raincoat, it looks ridiculous.

"God, turn that off," George says, throwing a glance towards where Dream's phone sits. A speaker blinks at them from the other side of the room. "What are you even listening to?"

Dream gapes at him, although he's not sure why he's surprised. "You don't know Alice In Chains?"

"Not particularly."

He thinks about grabbing George's shoulders, about shoving back him onto the floor so hard his knees bruise. About the way he'd gag around him. Eyes finally falling to rest so Dream doesn't have to spend his afternoon gazing into cold, uncaring irises. Tears running down his cheeks, imperfectly beautiful as Dream closes off his airways until he's scrabbling at his thighs, desperately attempting to draw air back into his lungs. The way he'd blossom pink. The way his lips would swell, glaze cherry.

But they should probably work on the concerto.

"Alright, princess." He disconnects from the speaker so they're plunged back into the freezing Atlantic. "You can sit on the bed, or whatever." Something about the mental image of George crossing his legs atop office-texture carpet is fucking hilarious to Dream, but he doesn't think George would want to sit his pretty ass on the floor for fear his bones would shatter.

"I would love to," George says, dripping with the sort of acid which suggests he would very much *not* love to.

But he can't exactly complain, because he's the one who insisted upon making the journey here, upon shoving his porcelain nose into Dream's life and rooting around with ivory tipped fingers. It's sort of pitiful. George is so obviously unsettled by the memory of Dream reducing him to nothing, of a steady palm crackling with bloodrush over the side of his face. This is his way to regain control. He clings to the hull of the ship with tremors in his hands, praying, praying, praying his desire for his virtuoso won't tip him right over the deck into the seas of Scandinavia.

So they sit across from each other, blaring sun and scalding bluster, spiced cinnamon wine decaying to acid while they negotiate which sections to hack over.

George looks ridiculous kneeling on his bed, feet tucked beneath him in a manner that seems calculated, measured. He presses the eraser end of his pencil into his cheek as he skims over the sheet music, over all his grey markings and stark black notes, position shifts and fingerings and circled accents. It's a map, music torn to pieces by a cartographer.

"The third movement is horrible," he mutters, tapping the eraser against perfect teeth. "I don't even know if it's possible to make it sound good. *You* certainly can't."

"I like the third movement."

"Of course you do." George rifles through the music, turning the pages gently as if they're butterfly wings. "In that case, let's start with...the andante assai." The page falls open in finality.

Dream looks at him long and hard. "You're purposefully being a bitch at this point, you know?"

"What? It's the best movement."

"Sure. Whatever. I don't care anymore, let's just get this over with."

They lean over their parts, violins resting upon open cases within easy reach should they need to play through a section.

Over the course of the morning, his urge to snap George in half grows exponentially.

He insists upon discussing every phrase and dynamic change, pencilling in notes for just about everything. Dream isn't sure how George can read the music anymore, not when it's covered by a

grey haze of annotations and markings. The eraser taps against his teeth, erratic and jarring. Surely agonising over each infinitesimal twist and turn of the concerto isn't the way to achieve musical coherency, but George is in his fucking bedroom now and there's not much he can do to make him shut the hell up. His back presses against the wall, slumped in disinterest as he lets George talk at him.

By the time they get around to playing through a section together, Dream thinks he might cry with relief regardless of how much he hates performing alongside George's ruled notes and rigid attitude. He springs out of his slouch, grabbing for his violin with eager hands.

George follows with considerably less vigour.

"I'll count in," they chorus, posture mirroring each other's with their violins resting at their shoulders.

"I'm the fucking soloist, I'm counting," Dream says.

"You go too fast, it's one oh eight."

Before George can do something stupid like pull a metronome out, Dream rushes to deflect.

"Again, I'm the soloist, if you don't like it you should've tried harder at auditions. I'm leading."

He inhales, lifting his bow in an exaggerated movement, and they launch headlong into the section.

Dream can taste bile at the back of his throat by the time they finish the phrase, sickened by his melodies drowning in the greyness of the english channel. Shoved under water by demure hands, sent to seabed graves by pinpoint smiles pinned to a pretty face for the express purpose of getting his way. He doesn't want to handle George with velvet gloves and silk touches. He wants to tell him the truth, explain to him exactly why he can't stand to play with him.

The violin rests under his arm, the last note still trembling in the air before him. "Put your fucking soul into it, if you even have one. Let the music *move* you."

"I do move," George says, setting his violin down in its case. He's already reaching for the damned pencil, already stretching towards the abandoned manuscript.

"You move in all the ways the page tells you to, you play everything like you've rehearsed every breath of it. You move to guide your section, George."

"That's what I'm supposed to do."

"Sure, it's what you're supposed to do, but it's boring. Worry less about playing every note the best it can be, and be daring. That's how you become better."

"There is no space for error in the Carnegie, virtuoso."

"Maybe not, but if I have the choice between perfection and risk, I choose risk." A smile pulls over his face, snakelike, horned, devilish. He would rather fuck up all his runs, snap his strings, miss his position shifts than play like George, with each note measured to the nanosecond.

"You *ruin* the music," George spits, autumn fire blazing up at him.

"I'll ruin you next," Dream says, and it sounds like a growled promise, sounds like a bow sliced

across the bottom string until the bridge creaks under the force of it.

“We need to work on the third movement,” George says. The tension diffuses, reducing back down to a simmer as they glare and glare at each other.

“Fucking finally.”

Dream stretches out his legs when George is tucking his violin back into the case, fingers loosening his bow to the point he can slide it into place. Silk covers the strad with floral whispers, delicate and expensive and sickly. Pollen clots in his throat, petals line his mouth with waxy pink.

“I don’t know anything about you, concertmaster,” he says thoughtfully, pushing a hand through his hair to shake some of the stiffness from his arms.

“What could you possibly want to know?”

George slams the lid of his case and the latches flip into place. If they were operating under usual circumstances, this would be his cue to leave, to shoulder the case and disappear into the intestinal mess of grid streets and blocky skyscrapers, throw himself into the dreary drizzle that plagues the city these days. Winter hurries closer, condemning them to rain and ruin.

But there’s nothing usual or conventional about their predicament. George sits on the bed once again, cupping the curve of his jaw in one open palm. His eyes glimmer with curiosity, urging Dream forwards.

Dream thinks very long and very hard about what he’s going to ask.

“What’s your favourite colour?”

“Is this your dumb attempt at an icebreaker? It’s not going to make me like you,” George says. When Dream waits with an eyebrow raised, his shoulders slump in defeat. *Kneel for your virtuoso.* “Blue.”

“Really? I thought it would be red.” Red is for blood boiling underneath paper skin, red is for the plush lining of a violin case, red is for hot anger and seas of plague. Red is dirty money, red is matured wine and red is the sharp skin of shining apples, waxy to the touch and ruined by straight teeth. The *snap*, *crunch* of a broken spine.

George snorts. “I can’t even see red.”

“You can’t?”

“I’m colourblind, idiot.”

“Huh. That figures.”

“What?”

“It’s the way you play. It’s muted, you know.” The inverse of synesthesia, notes falling in grey hailstones from gentle clouds, an expanse of colourless heaven producing diamonds instead of precipitation. And petrichor would be better than nothing, but George hurries out of the storm to shelter his pretty head from its wrath. A sky of rayon, a canopy of safety blanket umbrella.

“I don’t need *colours* to play the notes right. Some of the hypotheses you come up with are inordinately stupid.”

Dream thinks about his world of decay and rot, his realm where plate tectonics crumble under his feet and his bow gleams scythe silver. The luthier boat he boards to get there, barely withstanding the threat of capsizing as the styx batters against its hull. Blood dripping from the clouds. Half masted flags tearing in the wind, poppies lining the riverbank as he descends and descends and descends. Perhaps colours are more important than George thinks, because without seeing the world through crimson and scarlet vignette, Dream isn’t sure he’d be able to pour as much raw horror into the music as he does.

“Is there anything else you wanted to know?”

George tears him from his reverie, pale hands grasping his achilles tendon to set him down in a siberian plane. Iced pools, desolate ground, yellowing coniferous trees. He’s fucking freezing.

He ponders to himself, searching searching searching for anything he could shine a light into. “Do you have any siblings?”

“Two. Both older.”

Dream smiles slowly, carefully. Understanding bubbles in the pit of his stomach, malicious enough to turn his acid to chardonnay. George has thrown him a lead, tossed him an axe with which to begin hacking away his layers, peeling back the illusion of allure and perfect posture. “That’s it, isn’t it? They’ll inherit daddy’s position on the board, won’t they? And *Georgie* is allowed to run off and become a violinist, run all the way across the atlantic to New York so he doesn’t have to watch them making something of their lives.”

The room is deathly silent, the floor is lined with thistles. Itching sores work their way across Dream’s calves when he looks at George, lips pursed as he glares at the dirty laundry shoved into the corner. His hands lie across his lap, pretty like glimmering quartz. Dream wants to push more, wants to push and push until George turns ruby, teeth bared in pearly lines and dark citrine eyes blazing with amethyst.

“George was always for show, wasn’t he? The third child, taken out of the box at dinner parties to impress CEOs and board members.” He leans forward so his lips brush over George’s ear, cruel cruel cruel.

But Dream’s always been an advocate for Lucifer.

“You’re just so *pretty*, George. So boring, so plainly perfect it’s like you were made to be kept in a case. Paraded around every once in a while, put back in the cupboard when it’s over.”

Bloodless fists. “You don’t know anything, they- they played music too. It’s a privilege.”

“Ah, but they stopped, didn’t they? They weren’t shipped off to Juilliard, out of sight, out of mind.” His hands slide over a narrow waist, light enough for George to shiver. “And perhaps I’d understand, if only you could play the music with some semblance of artistry. But perhaps you’d be better off with your stock tickers and profit margins, because it’s far easier to get numbers right.”

“Go to hell,” George bites.

His lips coast downwards, skimming along the cold skin of George’s neck. “Gladly. They don’t call me a devil’s violinist for no reason. But I’ll bring you with me, concertmaster, just so I can

watch your skin melt away under the fires of Tartarus.”

It's frantic as they undress, violent limbs and stretched cotton. As if they've been balanced on a knife edge all day, waiting and waiting for the moment they'd tumble off the side of it, devolve into angry lust and hateful touches. And they both knew it all along, right from the moment George insisted upon coming here instead of neutral territory. Dream kicks his jeans off and discards them somewhere on the floor, uncaring of where they end up. He wants to ruin George, make him see stars until he can't remember how to play violin, until he can't play another pinpoint note ever again.

Curiosity sparks when he catches sight of George pulling his shirt off, revealing expanses of quartz and alabaster. But Dream's never liked the look of marble.

Instead, his eyes are drawn downwards, down over the small of George's back, over the jut of his hips. He reaches for him, revelling in the way George shudders when his hands come into bruising contact with his waist. And he pushes George forwards so his ass is bared to the afternoon air, so he can begin to piece together what he's looking at, because the concertmaster of the Juilliard orchestra is in his bed and his ass is covered in angry impact marks.

Dream thumbs over the skin where it flares a faded pink, where burst vessels mar expanses of perfect cream. “I knew you got off on this,” Dream hums, breath blowing over cold skin just to watch the way it makes George tense. He runs his fingers across red and rose, trailing pale stripes whenever he presses down. “Who put these here?”

He imagines George under the palm of someone else and it makes his stomach curdle. He wants to be the one to ruin him, to burst vessels and slap so hard George walks around covered in bruises. He wants to ruin George like he ruins his music.

“What's it to you?” George asks, but it comes out too clipped, too forced. A hasty construction of paper and mothcotton, tugged over the truth with nervous hands to conceal a thorny pit of shame.

Realisation dawns with all the clarity of December daybreak. Delightful, delicious.

“Oh my god. You spank yourself, don't you? Is it when you mess up? Do you get your ass out in the middle of the practice room and *spank* until you can play it right?”

The silence makes Dream giddy, makes him feel as if he's just been born from the stomach of hell and his flesh is still in the process of knitting itself together over his bones and marrow. “You *do*.”

“Shut up,” George hisses.

Dream feeds off the confirmation, imagines George fumbling over his perfect notes until he's forced to bend over a table and *smack*, paint his skin pink until he daren't blaspheme again. Eyes tearing with frustration because it's difficult to get the angle right, difficult to hit as hard as he deserves for the way he's butchered the music. Some twisted part of him hoping someone with bigger hands would walk in on him like this and spank with no abandon. The way he'd tremble as he reaches for his violin afterwards, back held straight and nervous because more mistakes would only result in further punishment. Soundproof walls keeping his dirty practice technique a secret.

Until now. Dream knows what he does to himself now, knows how he pushes and pushes until the notes are neat and tidy.

“Don't worry, concertmaster. I'll hit harder than you ever could, I'll slap so hard you leave here covered in goddamn bruises.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong,” George cuts. “I play perfectly.”

He leans forward until his lips are pressed directly over George’s ear, whispered tones blowing straight over his skin so he’s rewarded with a trembling shudder. A dip in his composure, a fault for Dream to stick his grapple hooks into and pull until George breaks down the middle. “But that’s the thing—you don’t. You play what’s on the page, nothing more, nothing less. I want to break you, George, I want to smack until you finally learn you need to put your goddamn soul into the notes for it to be worth anything.”

“What makes you think I value your opinion?”

Dream smirks, reaches around George to palm at his hardness. It makes his breath hitch even as he tries to contain himself, hips grinding forwards into a rough hand marred by playing calluses.

“Guess I’ll just have to fuck you until you understand.”

“You can fucking try.”

His hand stills. George whines under his breath, exhaling in gentle flutters against Dream’s neck. Head tipped back against his shoulder, pale expanse of his stomach bared to the early afternoon light, chest cresting and cresting and cresting in desperate motions as he drags air into his lungs. The curve of his cock, angry red and seething pink.

“Concertmaster,” he says slowly, dangerously. His thumbs dip into soft skin, pressing above George’s hip bones in a promise of dark purple, bursting bruises and autumn fruit. “I know you want me to fuck you. I’m not going to do it unless you tell me to.”

He wants to hear George *say* it, trip over the words as he begs the devil incarnate to drag him down to the pits of hell and work him open, spill into him so the inner workings of his soul are tainted white. Not in purity, not in agape, but in the forked tongues of albino snakes and the sweet flesh of apples. “Just,” George gasps when Dream’s hand slides back to press into the assortment of bruises and burst vessels, a thousand missed notes and incorrect bowings marked right onto his skin. “Just do it,” he finishes.

“Do what?”

“*You know what.*”

So George is determined to make this difficult for him. The clock ticks later and later into the afternoon, tugging Saturday with the force of the tide as Dream’s weekend is lost to Prokofiev 2 and pretty boys who think they’re entitled to his cock. His hand drifts up to rest at George’s neck, fingers reaching around his throat with just enough pressure for him to pulse with warmth. George inhales anyway, attentive. Anticipating.

“You’re usually so full of pretentious words,” Dream says, thumb pressing into the red mark stamped onto his neck by the body of his violin. “You’re usually running your mouth.”

George purses his lips, and it’s infuriating.

“I’m only asking for three of them, George. *Fuck me please*, you can manage that, can’t you?”

The porcelain cracks.

“Fuck me please,” he gasps, leaning back into Dream even as they fill the room with cold spite, burning hatred.

Dream smiles against the side of his head, satisfied. "That wasn't so difficult, was it?"

Whatever petty reply George formulates is cut off as Dream roughly pushes him down onto the bed, cock trapped between his stomach and crumpled sheets. His limbs are lax, delicate and narrow enough for Dream to do whatever the fuck he wants to him.

George shudders when the bedside drawer rolls open, shudders more when he hears the telltale click of a bottle cap opening. He pushes his face into the fold of his arms as if it'll erase what they're doing, as if it'll make his surroundings fall away into the void. And perhaps Dream would take offence, but something about George looking so ashamed of himself for enjoying this makes his heart soar, makes every tainted part of him croon in cantabile.

When his fingers are slick with lube, Dream pushes the pad of his index against George's rim, light enough it makes him arc backwards, muttered threats spilling from his lips as he commands Dream with all the force of a dragonfly in the eye of a hurricane. It spoils the rush of heat, turns beach sunlight to the stifling authority of a desert.

"Patience," Dream reprimands. He doesn't like brats, doesn't like boys like George who order him around as if they're not in his fucking bed.

When George tries desperately to fuck himself on Dream's fingers regardless, he pulls away to land a heavy slap on the delicate skin of his thighs. Another falls on the opposite side, so George blooms with twin carnations, each swathe of him glistening wet with lube and red with pomegranate. He cries out with each hit, fisting at the sheets, and when his gaze falls upon Dream, his chest heaves and heaves, his hips grind downwards as he searches for anything to relieve the tension. The temperature drops.

"What was that for?" George asks dumbly, stars swimming across his irises.

"I said *patience*," he mutters.

He preps George slowly, slow enough his cheeks are wet with tears of desperation by the end of it. Dream makes sure to avoid his prostate, twisting his fingers deeper and deeper but never nudging against where he needs it most. And every time George curses at him, every time he protests or whines loud enough to rouse the heavens, he's met with Dream's palms cracking over his ass, his thighs, the side of his face. Each one resounds like a broken note, a rest held for too long. An incorrect bowing, a tremolo too rigid or a col legno executed poorly.

He's painfully hard by the end of it, straining against his stomach in shades of angry red. But it's worth it to see the way George writhes for him, to see his hole as it clenches and clenches around Dream's fingers, as his petal lips open to demand more. The expanses of his skin burn hot and irritated, marks left in the shape of hands far bigger than his own.

Dream almost cracks when he lines himself up, almost thrusts in to the hilt because his mind has started to trip over itself in anticipation. Round and round in hazy circles, white painting over his vision.

Ice scorches his stomach, cold and unbearable.

It's blistering when he pushes into George, inch by excruciating inch because as much as he would love to break George in half, shatter him like a glass figurine thrown against the wall, he suspects George would love it too. Better to ease into hell with waves lapping against their hulls, better to hold back until George has rivers overflowing across his cheeks and fingers clutching desperately at the sheets as he begs Dream to go *deeper*, go *quicker*.

He knows he's guessed correctly when George whines, high and broken with only half of Dream's cock settled in him. "Hurry up," he begs.

Dream stills.

His hand ghosts over swells of red skin, barely there, featherlight. "George. You know better than to tell me what to do," he says. "Don't you fucking learn?"

And as the hit lands, as George moans into the fold of his arms, Dream supposes it's a stupid question. Because George relies on this to play violin, adds red bloodrush to himself every time he can't recite the notes right. Even after he hits and hits and hits, the music still comes out emotionless. Unmoving. Apathetic. Dream knows he can spank George as much as he wants and it'll make no difference, because George is used to the entire world being handed to him upon a silver platter.

He fucks into George slowly, satisfaction brewing in his heart when George chews at his bottom lip to stop himself from whining. More and more, until his hips are pushing against inflamed skin, until George tightens around the entirety of him in relief.

"s big," he admits, fists balling into tight carnations when Dream thrusts, slow enough to make him desperate. Gossamer shines across his back, damp to the touch, stoned with tiny crystals.

"Really? I thought you said you've seen better."

"I-" he breaks off as Dream *finally* nudges up against where he needs it most, pushing and pushing until George tenses, iron lining all his muscles. Then he withdraws, sliding out so George is left to squeeze helplessly around his tip, pressing backwards like it'll make him cave. "I *have* seen better. I can fuck anyone I want, doesn't matter how much they hate me," he says, smug contentment radiating from his narrow shoulders. As if Dream's fallen for something, as if he's fallen for George's pretty smiles and slender wrists like hundreds before him.

He pushes his fingers into George's hair and pulls hard.

"I suppose you want me to dote on you," he mutters, even as George protests the pressure against his scalp. He pulls a frigid back against his chest so he can skim his teeth across George's neck, sink gentle bites into alabaster skin. "You want me to tell you you're pretty, you want me to tell you you're beautiful, talented. You want me to snap my violin in half, give you everything you want."

"I'm pretty," George says in defiance.

His teeth sink deeper this time, promising purple and amethyst. "It's not going to work, concertmaster. You're here on my terms, and I'll leave as soon as I'm tired of you." A practise room door, slamming shut to contain starlight and moon pallor. "But I despise your playing, I despise you, and I know you despise me just as much. And that's why I'm staying, because I'm prey to *modernity*, and *I love to hate*."

"I hate you."

"I know. And it's the best thing you could possibly do for me."

Because George stands against the tide of praise, the current of fear and muted awe. He stands at eye level with Dream, even though in reality the top of his head falls a few inches too short, always destined to be second best. His hands don't tremble as he smashes display cases, as he hurls insults at god-given gifts and dashes dynasty vases against museum marble. George isn't his equal. But

sometimes, Dream wonders if by acting like it, he's the only person in this entire wretched world who comes close.

Dream sucks at his neck, teeth and tongue tightening around soft skin to maul it to incomprehension. Jaw floods his vision as George's head tips to the side, stretching his swan neck for more, more, more. How easy it would be to tear out his jugular like this, snake canines tearing into his throat as his arms wrap tighter and tighter around George's waist with every heartbeat. His cock pushed deep into him, throbbing with spiteful venom.

And when he's had enough of George's breathy gasps, he shoves him forwards onto his hands and fucks him as hard as he wants, relentless and beautiful.

He treats him like he treats music, perfect notes forged with the purpose of being broken, blue blood running hot against light skin and hotter through hate-filled hearts. Dream takes George apart, deconstructs him to a splintering mess. Strings wrap around his neck, and red lines blossom beneath each one. His cheek presses against the bed when his elbows tremble, unable to do much more than take and take and take whatever his virtuoso feels generous enough to give him. Greed emanates from his narrow frame, a wicked gluttony for more, a thirst to dance in the flames because he likes the way fire feels when it's licking at his calves.

"I need to—" George breaks off when Dream thrusts deep, filling him to the brim with blasphemy. He moans—broken, lacking his usual berceuse lilt. It's pathetic.

"You need to cum?"

A nod, tight and ashamed.

"I don't know why you're asking permission," Dream says, punctuated as he fucks into George harder. Breath hitching from exertion, hands grabbing at slim hips so hard he's certain they'll turn purple under his fingers. "You never listen to anything else I have to say."

It's all the affirmation George needs to spill onto his stomach, contracting around Dream with mind-numbing pressure as he cums hard. He trembles under the force of it. His lips fall open to cry out, the most entrancing music he's ever produced flooding from his snake tongue as Dream pushes him through it, desperate to hear how shattered George sounds.

And he doesn't stop.

George twitches with every brutal thrust, cheeks wet with ocean brine. Overstimulation wracks through him, dredging up notes covered in silt, melodies ruined by serial accidentals and bridges giving way to pure force.

"Hurts, it hurts," he babbles, so easily reduced to nothing as the flat of his stomach swells.

Ice covers his fingertips, a hand reaches up to cradle George's jaw. He slows, ceasing movement so he can appreciate the way George trembles for him, painted in shades of pink and red, all his breath shuddering from slicked lips. "Do you want me to stop?" He asks.

George falls silent for a moment before he's shaking his head, bottom lip seized between his teeth.

"No," he whispers, begging forgiveness. "Keep going."

Dream smiles because it's exactly what he was expecting to hear.

"Okay."

He fucks into George hard, thrusting deep enough he swears the sky flickers with red. Thunder rolls in the depths of his mind, a promise of shattered tectonics and bristling tidal waves, magma and molten rock pooling at his core as he chases release.

And George takes it all, neck limp because he's been reduced to nothing more than a fucktoy, limp wristed and incoherent. He moans for Dream, sobs out his name in a string of broken syllables. Dream is sure lightning crackles in his stomach, singeing the soft lining of it to a charred crisp, but he's so fucking desperate to be full up of immorality that he allows Dream to use him however he sees fit.

It's dirty when he finishes, pulsing and pulsing with broken notes, a bow sawed across strings so hard they snap. And George coaxes more, warm around Dream even though the rest of him runs cold, even though frost bursts under his feet when he walks and arctic night adorns the jilted crown of his head. His eyes fall shut as Dream spills into him. Sin, pulsing through every membrane of his being, angry red pulling his blood closer and closer to hedonistic purple.

Dream pulls out and drinks up the way George flinches at the loss, hips pushing back like he'll die without Dream leading him to hell, one hand gripping his wrist.

And just because he can't help it, he allows his palm to crack over cold skin. Red blooms over crimson, more scarlet rushing to the surface as George eases onto the bed, eyes flashing with deep thunder.

"Why did you do that?" he asks. His rage is concealed when he adopts a masquerade of sleep, fingers curled delicately against the sheets and cheek pushed into Dream's pillow. It'll most likely stink of iris when he leaves, and the thought of it makes his stomach turn.

"Just felt like it." Dream shrugs, before remembering George can't see him.

It's fucking typical—George can't even spare Dream his attention, instead electing to take up half his sheets with entitlement folded into his expression. As if he hasn't just had the soul fucked out of him, purity spilled into the drain along with all his agency. White decorates his skin, tracking dangerously close to linen. But George doesn't move to do anything about it, so Dream supposes he has to sort it out himself.

He grabs George's shirt from the floor, balling it up in one hand so he can clean a pale stomach with Pima cotton just because Dream likes to ruin expensive clothes, pretty faces, elegant music. And even though he's staining the shirt with fucking cum, George's eyes remain shut, chest rising and falling in rhythmic intervals as he expels air from gently parted lips. Dream feels something needling at his chest. Disorientating and unfamiliar, a flock of angry magpies picking apart his organs.

The shirt is discarded on the floor again once George is cleaned up. He looks so much worse without sinful white dripping from his navel, narrow wrists set upon the sheets like daisies, hair dark enough to incite an eclipse in the middle of the damn afternoon.

Dream lies next to him, stiffening at the feeling of ice skin pressing up against his side.

There isn't a practise room door to disappear through this time.

Morbid fascination blooms in the core of his heart, unwelcome attentiveness to how George looks when he's weary, when he's lying in the centre of Dream's bed with his limbs stretched out as if he owns it. Dream looks over the divots of his ribs, the tip of his nose, the red dusting across the tops of his cheekbones. Bruises punched across his thighs, his hips. Teeth marks set into his neck, red

fading back to snow faster and faster as the blood withdraws from the surface.

“Do you think I’m pretty now?” George is looking up at him, watching as he drinks in every diamond facet and stave line of his figure.

“Pretty detestable,” he says.

They lie for an indiscernible lapse. Dream thinks the sun could very well burn up in the time they exist with an ocean seething between them, could toss out its last rays of light to the void and leave them with the tidal wave of roaring sound unheard due to the lack of atmosphere. There’s no baton here to mark out the seconds, no metronome ticking, no soles tapping against lacquered wood to tell one beat from the next. George breathes with the force of moth wings against an exposed lightbulb. It’s too delicate, too soft, and Dream would rather forget time exists altogether than use the rise and fall of his chest to measure it.

The silence grows tiresome, too much like a concert hall between movements. Dream wants to hear him speak, wants to watch him struggle to string together words because he floats in an ocean of contentment, a pool of hate. “What’s your favourite symphony?”

“Is this your stupid icebreaker thing again?” George asks in disbelief, exasperation flooding from the set of his shoulders.

“Come on, indulge me, concertmaster. You just had my cock in your fucking stomach—don’t you think I deserve some kind of repayment?”

George’s eyes slip shut for a moment, thighs pressing together like he’s remembering how *deep* Dream had been inside him. Deep enough to bruise, to burn, to blossom with scalding carnation. “Beethoven 9.”

Dream wants to fall asleep. “That figures. Boring choice for a boring person. Couldn’t you have picked something less fucking *typical*?”

“I could’ve said anything and you wouldn’t want to hear it, virtuoso,” he says quietly. And it’s true, in fairness. They’re deaf to each other, only interested in biting, scratching, slapping, bruising until blue and red collide in deep purple. “What’s yours?”

“I like Sibelius 2.”

“Really?”

He shrugs, poking at the gaps between George’s ribs to watch the way it makes him flinch. “I performed it in highschool, sometime at the beginning of summer. I was concertmaster every single year, so I’m sure most of the section hated me,” he laughs, remembering the way the stars had been glimmering down at swamp water and humid asphalt by the time the performance was over. “It’s weird—Florida is the polar fucking opposite of Finland, but I kinda felt like I understood the guy that night. So I guess I pick my favourites because of emotion, you know?”

He feels strangely vulnerable when he’s done, presenting his nothing-special life to George for him to pick apart with a platinum scalpel. Dream does everything with his heart, commands notes with a bloody pulse, hates with his entire soul and dances in the rain just to revel in the way it feels running over his cheeks. Orange bursts across his tongue, citrus and cypress compressing to murky brown.

“Touching,” George deadpans.

“Oh come on. He called it a *confession of the soul*. Isn’t that what music’s supposed to be?”

“Nobody wants to see your soul.”

Dream supposes that’s fair enough. His lips quirk upwards because George has teeth, George isn’t afraid to insult him to his face even if he still has Dream’s cum dripping out of him in unholy desecration, dirty and raw and real. “I prefer concertos, anyway,” he says, running his fingers over sharp hip bones just to watch the way George pretends it doesn’t make him shiver.

“You’re the most self-absorbed person I’ve ever had the displeasure of knowing,” George bites, and perhaps it would send snowflakes across the skin of anyone else, but they melt off Dream as soon as they connect. He’s not scared of a little frost.

“I’ll perform Sibelius’ concerto for you, concertmaster. I’ll do it better than you’ve ever heard. Better than you could ever hope to play it. I’ll make you see.”

George’s lips curl to reveal pointed canines, poised and gleaming. Straight. Dream wants to knock them out with iron knuckles. “I don’t need you blaspheming in front of me. You do it quite enough already.”

“Let me guess, you hate me? You wish I’d never set foot in the Carnegie again? Then why are you still in my fucking bed?”

“Good question,” George retorts.

Dream is graced with the sight of marble planes as he sits up, manuscript skin flexing over every bump and divot of his stave-skeleton as he reaches weary fingers towards his discarded shirt. Delicate freckles bead across his back in rain movements, Autumn showers preserved there for a short eternity. He realises his shirt is tainted with the remnants of their joint release, dried and sticking the folds together.

A sigh escapes him. “Give me one of your shirts.”

Dream raises an eyebrow, throwing a hand through his hair when George looks down at him. The shirt still cradled in pale hands gingerly, as if it’ll bite him. “You want to borrow one of my peasantry shirts.”

“There’s cum all over mine.”

He feels light headed with how absurd *cum* sounds when it’s spilling from George’s eloquent lips, but he guesses it’s nothing compared to the way he’d fucked his throat until he couldn’t breathe. He laughs anyway because the hilarity of their predicament is too much to handle, but is only rewarded by a knife glare. November cold.

“Sure, take your fucking pick, princess. You know where the closet is.” Studios don’t leave much to the imagination.

After a moment of rifling his slender hands through Dream’s clothes, George pulls a black tee over his head, too short to conceal how mauled his thighs are, too loose to hide the marks stamped across his neck, his collarbones, the side of his throat. Dream feels something inexplicable thump around like a bloody heart in the pits of his stomach because George is wearing his fucking Bleach shirt and his hair looks dumb and he’s not running his mouth for once. He thinks it might be hatred.

Dream hates it, but guilt swirls between his bones, an unwelcome whirlpool fuelled by bruised skin and spaced out eyes. The way George is dressing himself, limbs held awkwardly because the early stages of deep rooted aching are wrapping thorned hands around his wrists.

“Are you like, okay getting back?”

George glances over at him as if he’s just crawled out of the drain, robed in billowing steam. His fingers tap at his phone, heavy glass and dark backing all out of place in the gentle lines of his hands. “Drivers, Dream,” he says, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

And the hatred is back, snapping the spine of guilt between strong jaws, the resounding *crunch* beautifully familiar in the seething expanse of Dream’s mind. “Yeah. I fucking hate you.” He allows his head to fall back until his hair tumbles over the sheets. George will never have to touch the underbelly of anything, never have to step around puddles of dirt and descend beneath the concrete surface of the city. His fingers drip with cloudmatter, his feet are cushioned with cotton and linen.

“I’ll see you in rehearsal,” George says, pulling his violin case onto his back. “Please make sure you can play it by then.”

“I can fucking play it.”

His words are said to an empty room, because the latch clicks into place as George vanishes to the stairwell, the last impression of him the back of his violin case swinging out of sight. Glossy enough to reflect its surroundings, to act as a mirror presenting Dream’s face back to him with the same apathy as a news reader.

The hilarity of the situation dawns on Dream for the hundredth time, and although he should probably pull his violin back out the case and whip the last movement into something presentable, he finds himself sitting up with the sheets pooling at his waist. A jab of his thumb spurs the speaker into motion, waves of mind numbing sound replacing bitter silence. His phone sits in his hand. He feels sort of stupid about it, scrolling through his contacts like he’s in middle school and needs to whisper about George under an early morning sky full of regret.

He sighs and taps at Sapnap’s number, preparing himself for what might be the strangest fucking conversation of his life.

Chapter End Notes

thank u for so much love on the first part!! super cool! i would just like to say i’m bullshitting 95% of the music stuff please don’t believe me on any of it (yeah im including this after actual music people appeared in my comments and i got scared LMFAOAOAO hi guys please don’t judge me it’s all for the smut. please.)

edit i’m off anon because i got bored basically. here’s the [playlist](#) it’s chronological or whatever—please dont read into it i made it in about 3 seconds because idk i always just give dream my music taste it’s like a staple LOL

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

hello! i added the light angst tag just in case, honestly i'm not sure whether this fic warrants it but there we go. it's nothing out of the ordinary, just yknow, the usual trials and tribulations that accompany the enemies to lovers trope. anyways my fingers are bleeding after this one, please give me comments <3

ignore the spit violin as well please it's for the smut

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You *what*?”

Sapnap’s exclamation is exactly the sort of wakeup call he needs, the scream of a lark at sunrise, the horrified cry of someone finding their loved one without a heartbeat. Ice water over the head, burning his sinuses. With the eyes of a third perspective fastly upon him, with the opinion of someone who exists outside their strange little bubble of chamber concerts and arrogance allowed to mature for a hundred years, Dream can’t help but feel slightly ridiculous. He swallows hard.

“I’m fucking George,” Dream repeats. Each word reduces in size as he shies away from the blinding brightness of Sapnap’s focus, until he’s left with his knees pulled up to his chest as though to protect a soft underbelly. “We’re sort of in a...predicament.”

“Are we still talking about the same person? The British guy from the Menuhin? I thought you hated him. You just said you hated him. You’ve hated him since you were sixteen. I don’t get it.”

A hand drags over his face, barely containing the sigh he releases. It’s dredged right up from the deepest seas of his soul, weary with months and months of burning hatred. Matches are destined to flicker away to embers eventually, no matter how much gasoline he keeps pouring into his mind. “I do. That’s mainly why I’m doing it.”

“God, you’re so fucked up. Why can’t you just...I don’t know, find someone you actually like, that’s what the rest of us *mortals* do.”

“Mortals?”

Sapnap laughs at the bewilderment bleeding into his tone, all playful warmth and scherzo light heartedness. “Don’t act like you don’t feed off the whole Prince-Of-Darkness thing, I know you do. Dude, it’s okay to play boring sometimes, you don’t have to make fucking perpetual motion sound violent.”

“Okay, you’re exaggerating.”

“Am I?”

He squeezes the bridge of his nose, sharply exhaling so he’ll convey his irritation even over a crackling phone line. Thinking about George for too long sets him right down on the precipice of a jutting canyon, a hair's breadth away from toppling over the edge and snapping his neck upon crimson rocks, even as his skin sheens with the remnants of lust.

“Listen, at least I’m only like that while I’m *playing*, right?” He ignores the way Sapnap jumps to protest, hurrying forward with the vigour of an angered God. “He walks around scowling at me, seriously. His entire personality is like, violin.”

Sapnap sighs. “Dream...”

“Oh shut up.”

“It’s true! You took the Lucifer thing and fucking ran with it, you’re not modern day Paganini, Jesus Christ.”

“Okay. Whatever.” He runs a weary hand through his hair, all the energy to protest flowing right out of him. “You know what I mean, right? He’s just...I fucking hate him. I wish he just stayed in England so I’d never have to see him again.”

What Sapnap says next clocks him over the head with something spiked and unpleasant, swinging for his face out of nowhere. Dream thinks he could’ve been given a decade to prepare and he still wouldn’t have been quite ready for Sapnap saying, “are you certain you don’t like this guy?”

“What?”

“Are you certain you don’t like him?” Sapnap repeats, sounding altogether too pleased with himself. He’s probably smiling to himself, Dream realises, a smug curve fitted over his face because he’s halfway across the country and he can stick his nose into Juilliard over the phone for fun every once in a while. And he’s always liked chaos, always liked watching things burn just as much as Dream does.

Indignation tears at him. “I wish I’d never met him, of course I don’t like him. I’m fucking him because I’m trying to teach him a thing or two.”

“Well yeah, but...Dream, the way you talk about him is sorta impassioned. You said he looks at you different to everyone else, you said he’s the only person who doesn’t give a shit about your playing. Shouldn’t that make you like him? Maybe if you made an effort to be *nice* to the guy, you’d warm to him.”

“He’s the most fucking pretentious, entitled, s-”

“Dream, I hate elitists as much as you do, but you’re not gonna get through to him by grinding his gears on purpose. And you should know better than anyone the boundary between hate, lust and love isn’t always so obvious,” Sapnap says, like he’s holding a book of goddamn allegories.

“I’m not fucking in love with *George*.”

“No, you just fuck him despite saying you hate him. And you can rant about him unprompted. And you actively look for opportunities to play to him,” Sapnap rattles off, and Dream can envision him ticking each one off with his fingers. A self-satisfied smile growing for every twist of the knife.

“Be honest, since when have you ever wanted to play *for* someone before?”

“Yeah, it’s just so he’ll stop playing so godawful-”

“So you want him to become better. Question for you—why the fuck do you care?”

Why *does* he care? Why can’t he just leave George alone, leave him to his ruled notes and measured bow strokes? Dream always seems to be the one to prod and push, to throw kindling on the fire, followed by an entire canister of gasoline when George retaliates, brown eyes rolled

heavenwards. Perhaps if he didn't lord his talent over George's head, he'd withdraw back behind his veil of flattened fingers and french whispers. He'd look down his nose again, content to pick at Dream behind his back. Green with envy.

But Dream seems to garner a morbid fascination for every diamond facet of him, a fixation upon things which should be out of his reach, things that are dangerous. Things which could *ruin* him. The heat is electrifying, heroin with his name written all over it.

He can't get enough.

"I...I'm not sure."

"I've never heard you so fucking uncertain," Sapnap says, barely containing the delight Dream can so obviously hear permeating his tone. "This is great. I love George."

"I hate you. I hate you so much."

"Please don't say that after you just said you hate the guy you're fucking. And are probably in love with—"

"You know what? I'm done with this conversation," Dream says, peeling the phone away from his face so the screen washes each curve of him with cool light. Autumn rain, dreary and revelatory. "Goodbye."

His thumb jabs at the red icon, and he's plunged back into blissful silence. He can't exactly say he's surprised—Sapnap is never much help with actually figuring out his problems, but he makes them sort of humorous, and Dream loves him for it. A laugh bubbles out of him. The surrealism of the situation crushes his skull with barbed hands, squeezing and squeezing until his surroundings bleed with bulging eyes and swirling delirium.

It's so fucking stupid. George is just about the only person who stands out in the mess of cramped corridors and jumbled practice rooms, cheeks stippled with red and white spectres fawning at his elbows. And it really shouldn't be the case. The way he plays is boring, marked by pencil lead. Manufactured notes pour from his slender hands, arcing neck, dark eyelashes fluttering over darker eyes as he regards music and reproduces it to perfection. Dream shouldn't give a shit, should look the other way whenever George plays, but instead he steps into the burning hate pit over and over and over.

A groan is pushed into the palm of his hands, cut off when his neighbour whacks a fist into the wall. He knocks back just for the fun of it, irritation plucking at his ribs. Paint flakes away to reveal brown plaster.

When he receives silence in return, Dream decides he should probably get the fuck into the shower and go back to slicing his fingertips open upon violin strings.

Much to his chagrin, he's made no progress with sifting through the catastrophic mess assigned to *George* which sits dead in the centre of his mind when he next sees him.

He's on time for once, entering the rehearsal hall at half eight with sleepy eyes and a coffee cup habitually clenched in his hand. Draft blows behind him, pushed by the double doors. Sheet music flutters upon stands, the corners flexing under the breeze like brown leaves in a storm, torrents of November plaguing the streets in sparrow clouds. Curious eyes curve in his direction, and it takes the remaining dregs of his energy to maintain a weary smile.

And of course George is already here. Dream could be two hours early and he's certain George would be waiting for him in first chair, bottled water placed next to a narrow ankle and soft lead clasped between his teeth. His fingers fly over the strings, articulate and precise. A sickening sense of déjà-vu overcomes Dream when he's retrieving his violin from the case, tightening his bow and fitting the shoulder rest onto the back of it. Tuning his strings with a squeezed thumb and forefinger, obnoxious in the hazy morning quiet.

"Good morning," he says once he's standing next to George. But it's different this time, because George has knelt for him now, whispered curses and screamed damnation when he'd overstimulated him to the point of gentle Summer tears.

George's bowing arm stills, a perfect octave dying in the space between them. "You're on time." Deep eyes slide over his face, blinking up at him as though ascertaining he's real, standing in the middle of the rehearsal hall at twenty-five-to-nine with his nothing-special violin tucked under one arm and his thumb stuck in a frog's mouth.

"I set my alarm early, just for you," he says.

"Wow. I'm honoured." George's tone is all sarcastic in the way Dream detests, drawing out his vowels for too long in his dumb accent. It's similar to the way he gasps out Dream's name, long and legato and splintering upon the sidewalk. He's staring at some point past Dream's head, brows pushed together in consideration as the ice rivers locked in his mind flow around at glacial speed. Uncertainty blooms in Dream's stomach. The feeling of a magnifying glass running over his skin is detestable, blowing his cracked cuticles and wind-crumpled clothes and the common cadence of his voice to extortionate size. Sunlight burns him, scalding as it passes through glass.

Curiosity gets the better of him. "What the fuck are you looking at, concertmaster?"

"Your ears, they're pierced."

"Huh? Oh, yeah," he says, reaching up to roll the stud between his thumb and forefinger. He doesn't bother wearing them all the time, but this morning he woke up to the scream of larks with a mind full of pink lips, expensive violins and round glasses. Needless to say, he kicked the sheets about for a good ten minutes before accepting defeat and dragging himself to the shower. Now he has earrings in. It's not a big deal, except George seems to make a point of searching for all his flaws with nimble fingers and presenting them once they're surrounded by blue money and blood laundering. "I don't see what this has to do with Prokofiev."

"I'm trying to be nice. You don't have to be so hostile," George clips.

"Ah, but you make it so easy."

"Shouldn't you be warming up?" George deflects, crossing his legs and setting his bow across the stand.

Dream watches the movement, analytical. "Shouldn't *you*?"

"I've been here a while."

“Oh, I know,” Dream mutters darkly.

Blue light washes over George’s face when he unlocks his phone, thumbs skating over flawless glass in lazy motions. “Hurry up,” he says, lyrical cantabile spilling from his lips. He casts a glance around the rehearsal hall, at the last few seats which lie empty and the waves of chatter crashing over each other. Nobody pays them any mind. “I’m going to tune in a moment, and I’m not waiting for you.”

“Yes, concertmaster,” Dream sighs dramatically.

He turns around and plays as horrendously as he can manage, all unconventional phrasing and awkward bowing. And it’s worth it, because he’s pretty sure he can taste blood pooling in his mouth, the teeth of his mind’s eye sunk into the crook of George’s neck.

The clock snaps vertically, and he’s cut off by George standing up from first chair. *Upper wind*, he says, measured and even.

Dream fights the yawn which looms at the back of his throat. It’s going to be another long fucking morning.

George catches his wrist at the end of rehearsal, violin case in his other hand. A practise room no doubt awaits him, deep in his protective bubble of freshly painted corridors and gold paneled concert halls. The sun will slide right over the sky as he works and works, only interrupted when he leaves to pore over endless music theory. Then he can pencil to his heart’s content.

“What do you want?” he asks, mind already tracing the journey back home. It’s the middle of the week, and even though Dream should really be staying in school until sundown, he can feel the way his eyes are beginning to throb in their sockets. Grey must be pillowing under his eyes, a testament to his mind’s refusal to fall quiet once night swallows day. Bulging throat, razor teeth. Pretty boys with poised smiles, determined to haunt him with their rosary grips.

“Can we go over the third movement again? Tonight?” George’s eyes glimmer with devilry, reflecting the workings of Dream’s soul right at him in plain daylight.

He sighs. “I can’t.”

“Why?”

“I’m working, asshole. Not all of us live off trust funds.”

“Oh,” George says, lips pressed together. Dream readies himself for the sneer, the dark gaze down a pale nose, but it never arrives. Instead, George tilts his head to one side, contemplative. “Well, that’s alright. You’re free on Saturdays, aren’t you?”

A chill sweeps over him, as if there’s a flat plane of glass between them. Dream doesn’t like being watched, admired and gawked at like he’s an angel fish pulled from tropical waters. “You remembered.”

“Huh?” The circular planes of his glasses flash with rehearsal hall fluorescence. “It’s not a complex observation to make, virtuoso.”

“Right.” Dream’s mind hums with the realisation that George pays attention to him, George notices the studs pushed through his lobes, the frayed edges of the patches stitched to his jacket, the dried coffee haloes adorning his desk, the grunge he pumps out of his speaker as soon as he fits his violin back into its case. And a proposition blooms, wicked and sharp. “I’ll do it if you let me perform Si-”

“You’re not playing that concerto to me.”

“Oh, come on. I know you want to hear it. I know you’re burning with curiosity.”

“I’m not burning with anything,” he says, because he knows Dream likes to hold matches until they singe his fingertips. He knows Dream wants him to ignite, to be set ablaze with raw emotion and hatred rather than the glacially delicate way he handles all things material.

Dream leans forward until he’s eye level with George, cold and calculative. “I don’t offer to play for many people, concertmaster. Don’t be so ungrateful.”

“I’ll let you know if I change my mind.”

His lips purse in a way that screams, *I won’t*.

So George shows up at his apartment on Saturday, and it ends the way it always does, with Dream’s hands flickering over pale skin, trailing rose quartz wherever they connect. Pretty lips pushed into the pillow, gasping around choked moans as Dream drags his teeth along the curve of his neck. Brown eyes brimming with entire oceans, cheeks flushed Dream’s favourite type of red—the same crimson as fresh blood, scarlet wounds, straight from the beating life source.

“Dream,” he whines when he cums, face turned to one side as arachnids skitter away from the light. Back to the shadows, where it’s acceptable to dance in pools of revelry, drip with lust, paint taut stomachs with blissful white. Where nobody is around to witness any of it.

They lie awkwardly together when it’s all over, two gazes trained upon the cracks cobwebbing over the ceiling. Fissures which might seem otherworldly in the lowlight, but appear mundane, poorly constructed in the hazy stickiness of noon. Dream likes George better with stars sobbing onto his skin, trailing wisps of meteor blaze across his cheeks as he gags around his cock, throat flexing with something deep and dark and beautiful. Jaw open wide for his virtuoso. He looks better in Dream’s dimension of night. In the daylight, George appears as solid marble, crafted to be set upon a plinth and illuminated with dust-ridden sunshine.

George vanishes through the museum doors again once he’s caught his breath, another one of Dream’s shirts pooling around his waist, arms swimming in it.

Dream bites a goodbye to the solid wood of his door.

And so they compose an odd sort of symphony together.

Dream fucks George’s mouth, his hands, his ass, between his thighs, adorns his skin with red marks and flower shaped bruises. A strange rhythm is agreed. No words pass between them, but

they understand it's good to dance in the flames, to burn their moth wings to ashes because fire is addictive.

I hate you, Dream will whisper like he's confessing something entirely different.

George will glare at him, all frozen earth and snow covered skin. *Prove it*, he says.

Time after time, Dream takes George's pretty skull and dashes it against the rocks. And perhaps he's beginning to understand, because they love to hate, and it's just about the only thing they can agree on.

The day of the concert is marked by overflowing clouds, plumes of steam blowing out of grates and precipitation tracking over frosted windows. Perhaps Dream should feel a little downtrodden that the heavens have decided to rain on his parade, but he can't say it's all too unpleasant when he hurries up linoleum steps and is greeted by Autumn showers clawing at the exposed sections of his face. Traffic signals cut through the haze. Green, amber, blood red. Water pools upon the road surface, waiting to claim frayed hems and leaking soles.

He smiles and turns his music up.

The venue accepts him with stifling warmth, with plush scarlet and gold underfoot that he probably shouldn't be walking all over with pollution puddles clinging to him. But it's not like he's ever cared about desecration. Dream breezes through the place as though he owns it, commands every blaring light and hushed whisper with calloused hands, sleeps and lives and breathes music with his entire being. He supposes it's not far from the truth.

They rehearse one last time. Dream isn't sure why it feels like the end of an era. He's not sure what it'll mean for him and George, when they're not seeing each other every so often with two metres of fiery rage burning between them, rows of headstones to vignette whatever the fuck it is they do to each other behind sealed doors.

He stands in the rain with a cig for a short eternity once the rehearsal concludes, squinting up at the sky as if it'll allow him to see the smoke merging with the clouds better. But they're forged of the same cashmere grey, so it's a fruitless endeavour. Although Dream doesn't smoke habitually, concert nerves are beginning to worm their way into the workings of his soul, spreading parasitic branches of nausea and dread along each and every one of his neural passages. Perhaps he should be feeding off it, but instead he's standing in the doorway with heat pressing at his back, rain needling against his chest.

Dream has a tendency to fracture under pressure. Most pearls do.

Orange smoulders a watery death when he flicks it into a puddle, half finished. Behind its veil of clouds, the sun yearns for the horizon, tugging darkness behind it as their sorry section of earth tips to face the void. The temperature's dropping. Dream supposes he should change for the concert, pull on black linen and stalk around to watch the way the first violinists scowl at him.

So he changes. His hands shove damp clothes away, balling up his shirt so the decal sticks unpleasantly. It's only when he's waiting for the concert to draw nearer with his violin in his arms, nails tapping at the curves of it that his concertmaster shows up, expression softened by snowdrops and crocus.

"You look good," George says, thrown at him straight out of left field. He's looking at the cut of Dream's collarbones when he says it, revealed because he hates top buttons more than anything, and the next two aren't much better. The halves of his shirt part to show the chain he's definitely not supposed to be wearing, strung around his neck with the consistency of star-forged silver. Casting moonbeams over skin dotted with sunspots. And inexplicably, George's throat tightens, the corner of his jaw defining for a second with angular precision as he drinks and drinks, attention flickering over divots and swells and jutting vertebrae he should be very well familiar with by now.

But there's something delectable about all things hidden from the eye.

Dream takes a moment to swallow his bewilderment and survey George, casting a dissection glance over the way his shirt flows in uniform rigidity, midnight black in stark juxtaposition to the curve of his neck. Gentle rose dusts his cheekbones, distorted by full moon lenses. Every fucking hair on his head seems to be deliberately placed, curling against his forehead and nape so softly all Dream wants to do is ruin it. His own hair still has rain clinging to the ends of it. It crackles with stormcloud energy because he pushes his hands through it over and over, jittery with the nerves that accompany spilling his soul out to an auditorium full of the creatures who dwell in airy echelons. Creatures like George, hellish in their own way.

It's a terrible omen. Even though George knows how Dream's teeth feel on his neck, his ribs, his nape, how badly it burns and scalds him with hellfire, he's standing here adorned by straight lines and silk, violin tucked under one arm in preparation. Preparation to blow dust into the concert hall, iron all of Dream's vitality flat with measured notes and even runs. Sound echoing from archaic bricks. A coffin slammed shut, nothing like the unmarked grave Dream has to crawl out of to perform like he does.

His tongue flicks against the roof of his mouth in its forked atrocity. "You don't."

Irritation sparks. Carnation lips press together, the delicate pulse of red fire and blue blood flitting over George's stare. "Perform your best, okay?" he says, each syllable tight with bluster. "Once it's over, you'll never have to play with me again."

"Huh? I might feel like being concertmaster for the spring programme, you know. You'd like that, wouldn't you? My little second chair."

George's scowl deepens, cast into frozen ground by Dream's bow-shaped scythe. "You won't. You only perform concertos, everyone knows that."

"You talk about me a lot, concertmaster?"

"No. But everyone else in this godforsaken school does."

Oh, Dream thinks, smiling with venomous teeth. It must be torture for someone like George—to ghost around the corridors only to hear his peers revering Dream, hushed murmurs whispering about his command of the tides.

"Perform with your soul, and maybe they'll start kneeling for you," he mutters. "You would know all about that, I'm sure."

George doesn't have the chance to seethe at him, to curl his upper lip and look down his nose despite their height difference. They're beckoned to prepare, and George is unceremoniously tugged away from Dream by feminine fingers wrapped around his free wrist. "Breathe, Dream," is the last thing he says, cast over a narrow shoulder because the tremor of Dream's hands is far too obvious.

He's left with ice clogging his veins, heart beating hard between his lungs in dreadful anticipation. Dream lives for performing—he crawled right out of the womb with a love for jagged melodies and raw horror, but he can't shake the nerves that settle over his shoulders every time he has to walk onto a stage. It's much too imposing, with all those hundreds of eyes boring right into him. He plays for himself, and he's not sure how he feels about intruders.

Water fills his ears up when he's shifting between the dark pillars of their world, constructed with marble he can't afford to dent or scratch, marble he can't afford to take between his teeth, marble he bites and sucks anyway because it makes him retain some semblance of control. The surface crashes miles above him. He's utterly out of his depth. Great whites circle overhead, jaws poised with teeth strong enough to reduce him to a bloody pulp as soon as they see fit.

He can play pretend with George as much as he wants, but they both know who's tipping the scales.

Red crescents bloom along his palms, and he shoulders his way through the doors to escape the stench of blue blood, silver rings, ivory towers. A few of the violinists glance at him, but he pays it no mind. He's used to attention. Let them gaze until they wither away, reduced to stone by his snake stare.

The corridor is better, gives him enough room to drag lungfuls of oxygen into his chest. Cold in all the wrong ways. Empty in the way liminal backstage spaces are, home to none, and quiet despite the echo, stagnant air pressing at his face as his shoulders heave and heave under the pressure of the oncoming performance.

Dream deals with it in the only way he knows how, and runs through an arpeggio. Then another. And another. His fingers move free of his volition, pressing over the strings to emit the same notes he's played a million times, unique in the odd acoustics of this empty corridor. With his hands moving of their own will and his mind tracked onto the bow strokes as an afterthought, Dream can relax, allow the tension to flood out of his shoulders as he forgets about the people anticipating his performance.

"Virtuoso."

He doesn't startle.

"Already?" he asks with dread boiling in his stomach.

"I don't know why you're so nervous," George mutters, reaching out to pull Dream along behind him. He walks as if he's paced these corridors a thousand times, and Dream supposes he probably has. "I thought you don't care if you play it wrong."

Dream considers that for a while, lips pressed together as they watch the rest of the orchestra filter out onto the stage, faces upturned to amber lighting, confident hands clutching ivory, willow, grenadilla. Until it's just the two of them left standing together, shoulders tight with adrenaline. Darkness cloaking their faces. There's a certain mystery about this, about places they exist with the lights off. As if they've stepped into an alternate realm for a second, allowed to exist in soft harmony because nobody is around to observe them with wide eyes and gawking mouths.

“I don’t,” he whispers. “But I care about invoking a reaction, concertmaster. I’d sell pieces of my fucking soul, if that’s what it’d take.”

“You’re ever so dramatic.”

Before he can register what’s happening, George’s lips are glancing over his cheekbone, freezing cold just like the rest of him. Fingers curling into his hair, put there for the express purpose of throwing his mind straight off its gravitational axis. He stays for a second, contaminating every last one of Dream’s thoughts with vanilla and iris, with pearls and rain and Spring orchids. “Don’t worry,” he mutters, stepping away from Dream like nothing’s happened. “I’ve heard it one hundred times, and I assure you I’ll hate it. Even if nobody else will.”

Then he’s vanishing through the stage door, lips parted in the sort of smile that has to be learnt, dripping with decorum and gentility. The audience receives him graciously, so desperate to dote on the boy with soft hands and softer notes, a laugh which peals and eyes which sparkle starlight whenever he wills them to. Eyes which fall dead whenever he doesn’t.

Dream burns, and burns, and burns.

He barely feels the heat of the lights on his face when he faces the wave of applause, not when fire consumes his core and George smiles at him with closed lips from the front of the stage. Shadow pools behind him, skipping around his heels all the way to centre stage. Dream barely registers the maestro stepping onto the podium, appearance bracketed by more applause, more screeching cacophonies of disinterested flesh and demure hands.

His mind swarms. Even as he’s lifting his violin to his shoulder, bow to the string, Dream can’t shake the cold press of mausoleum marble against his cheek, polite and controlled and done with the express intent to throw him off. He would hate to let George win. He’s determined not to allow it.

Corpse blossom flowers at his feet when he begins to play, fingers tearing through flesh and marrow as he hurries away from the orchestra, absolutely uncaring of whether they’re able to keep up. Perhaps he’ll make George run circles around him.

A pause, and he’s pouring his rancor out to be severed upon guillotine strings.

He bleeds and bleeds, dripping acid over every note of the first two movements. The audience remains in dark anonymity because Dream isn’t brave enough to face them yet, isn’t brave enough to keep his eyes open for long enough to scan their faces and gauge their disapproval. That’s for when he’s standing here with clouds of violence enrobing him, George with his hands

Rocky ground rushes up to meet his face during the final movement, when he’s walking right over hot coals and revelling in the way the fire feels licking at his calves, because his top string snaps.

The string glances across his cheek, far too close to the delicate film of his eyes for comfort. Even as his heart stutters, he continues through the phrase, shifting to ridiculous heights upon the fingerboard as he negates the need for a fourth string. It quickly becomes apparent there’s no way he can get through the rest of the movement with a fucking string missing, fingers trembling as he instinctively reaches for notes which aren’t there, notes which have been snapped away from him by a broken string, left to rot and decay in barbed wire no-man’s land. Dream reluctantly accepts his fate.

And his heart should probably be decaying in his stomach acid by now, but Dream can only smile and turn towards his concertmaster, who glares up at him because he knows what's coming. Orchestra politics make sure of that. His wrists flash from under his sleeves, pale and snappable when he offers his violin up to Dream, thinly veiled threats sliding around under his skin, a candle behind drenched bedsheets.

I'm going to fucking kill you, George seems to say, evident in the clench of his jaw, the way his eyes frost, sleet sticking to Dream's skin as they exchange instruments.

You can try.

Dream fits the strad under his chin and turns back to the concert hall, raising his bowing arm to plummet off the deep end.

Sleet covers his back once he resumes. It feels better this time, with a piece of George in his arms, fingers pressing over all the same notes entirely different, coaxing pure life from the cadaver of it. He's sure George hates it.

That's why he finishes the concerto with a wicked smile, pointed teeth on show.

When the last note resounds, the concert hall bursts to life again, dozens of faces upturned towards Dream as they revere him, as they bring palm to palm and announce their devotion to him. It makes him fucking sick. He doesn't want applause, he doesn't want airy people like this staring up at him as if he's forged from crystal and ice. Dream wants silence, wants them to shift around in their seats like they've just witnessed a murder and blood is seeping across the stage.

There's nothing of the sort. They gaze upon him as if he's birthed of cloudmatter, like he's a divine blessing. As though his gift is beautiful in his hands, fingers marking out precise melodies with the sort of effortlessness and easy grace that belongs upon a mantlepiece, but never in the seat of an exorcist's office.

His eyes sting as he realises he's failed.

He pins gentility to his face anyway, and stands under the weight of saccharine approval.

George's gaze is heavy against his back when he exits stage, a chisel hammered between every ridge of his spine. Like George wants to mold him to, carve him into something more presentable so they can walk around in daylight streets and play lunchtime duets for golden-agers grimacing into willow teacups. A life of mundanity, a life hardly worth living. It stings, inserts thick needles into his vertebrae with velvet precision.

Inexplicably, there are flowers laid upon his case when he reaches it, remnants of backstage darkness still pooling in the divots of exposed collarbones. They look more suited to a funeral, with their waxen petals and oversized pistils. And his case is the coffin, a dark black box built to house decaying bones and rotting flesh. The corners of his lips quirk.

He doesn't think much of the lilies—they don't do much to sweeten the stab of failure, the floral snake wrapping itself around his neck. The presence of them in the crook of his elbow doesn't dissipate the storminess of his mood, even as his brain throbs and throbs with delicate fragrance.

He doesn't think much of the lilies.

He doesn't think much of the lilies until he's hurrying outside a little too fast, desperate to escape the chokehold the Carnegie exerts upon him, preserving his failure for years to come in detailed ceiling roses and red velvet opera boxes.

He only thinks of the lilies when they're tumbling from his arms, knocked askew by strangers who know nothing of what he's done tonight. Strangers who wouldn't care even if he told them, hellbent on jamming worn keys back into the doors of their apartments, warm beds, crying infants, walls full to the brim with photo film. They'd look at him with gazes overflowing apathetic sonder, mauve eyes sliding right over him. To these people, the devil is but a myth, a fantasy.

The flowers fall into the road, left to be trampled against wet concrete, white petals marked with grey footfall.

He forgets about the lilies after the concert.

Without rehearsals to attend and music to hash over and over into the dead of night, Dream sinks into a liminal sort of void, grey around the edges and marked with fat raindrops as the tug of winter grows more pronounced. And he doesn't see George for a few weeks. He has no reason to.

It's a Saturday when he emerges from the clouds once again, and Dream is running through solo repertoire with his gaze fixated upon the office worker who sits opposite his apartment and his mind fixated upon peach stone irises, veiled hatred, mother of pearl skeletons. Music hums out of his speaker even if he's supposed to be practising, because Dream likes to make everything more difficult for himself just so he can brag about it to the person who'll hate him for it most.

Dream's supposed to be the devil, but George chooses this moment to whack his knuckles against the door, breezing through the ground floor because he's over so much.

*She sought cracked pleasures
The passion of lovers is for death, said she-*

Dream hits pause before he reaches for the door handle.

George stands outside his studio, rain dripping over milky temples. He looks at Dream from under tousled hair, dark and gently waved in a way that screams imperfect, screams untidy and tugged by cold New York wind. His fingers comb through it in a last-ditch attempt to make it lie flat, but he's only rewarded with more strands flying free in stunning syncopation. This version of George is a novelty, ruined by rough hands. Dream's throat inexplicably tightens as he takes it in, thirsty for the precipitation beading upon pale skin.

"Let me in," he says.

"Demanding," Dream replies, nudging the door wider so George can hurry in and set his violin case down in the tiny entrance.

He pulls his coat off in a dramatic motion, water tumbling free of it as he hangs it on the back of Dream's door. An arc of black which sends waves of orris through the air, expensive and stinking of *daddy's money*. His shoes come next, discarded next to the jamb in perfect order. Lined up neat next to Dream's battered chucks in sickening juxtaposition. Dream can't help it—he kicks them skewish.

“Why’d you do that?” George doesn’t bother toeing them back into place, instead electing to walk into Dream’s room and sit himself down on the bed.

Dream shrugs. “Felt like it. Are you gonna tell me why you’re here? Concert’s done,” he says, feigning ignorance. Like he doesn’t know already that George wants the lights fucked out of him, wants to cup a bulbous red apple in his angel palms and sink his teeth deep into its flesh.

But George has a tendency to surprise him, to dance around Dream with a facade of nonchalance.

“Play,” George says, arms crossed over his chest. “The Sibelius concerto, play it. I want to feel better about myself.”

So he’s caved.

Rainy eyes follow his form as he steps closer to George, neck craned downwards so he can look right at him. Dream’s thumb rubs over a cold cheek, back and forth back and forth in lazy legato. “I don’t go around crushing dreams for fun,” he mutters, low and dangerous. “But for you, I’ll make an exception.”

A laugh, bell like and saccharine. “Don’t worry about my dreams, virtuoso.”

Beneath it all, pain flashes in bursts of ochre.

“That’s the point, I’m not.” His hand falls free as he backs away. “Can I borrow your violin?”

“Why?”

He shoots George a cutting look. “Because it’s a fucking strad, idiot. Someone needs to play it right every once in a while, it’s the least it deserves.”

“Sure, but if you break a string again or *anything* I’ll cut your dick off.” George waves a hand through the air, shuffling around on the bed until he’s leaning against the wall. Narrow shoulders relax in disinterest.

“Nah, you wouldn’t. You love how it feels too much.”

He tunes out George’s bitchy whining by setting to work on the case, flicking the clasps with steady fingers and cracking the lid so more orris pours over him in an iris shower. Vanilla and violet, curling around him in sickening luxury. Then his fingers are running over soft velvet, crimson as blood under his fingertips, as scarlet as cream flesh exposed to the relentless force of his palms. His lips quirk. The violin is revealed from underneath all its silk protection, each cover undoubtedly more valuable than an entire month of Dream’s rent. It injects seasickness into his stomach when he discards each one, pushing aside swathes of cherry blossom and chrysanthemum to yield darkwood.

“Ready?” he asks when he’s straightening back up, George’s violin humming with ghosts and spectres and haunted souls under his palms. He loves this violin, loves it more than its owner ever can. Innumerable people have played this violin, aged, died, decayed. Left the instrument on the surface while their bones settled into the ground, fingers still twitching with the memory of what it means to make music.

“Get on with it.”

So he plays.

Dream remembers when he'd first learnt this concerto, eyes wide with wonder at the things it made him see. Snow dripping blood, frigid air and lungs smothered by ice water. Maybe that's why he likes the way George looks, with his alabaster marked red, with his lips parted as he gasps and gasps for oxygen, trembling with hypothermia. The water crashes over his head and solidifies. He's trapped in winter.

He remains poised once it's finished, fingers nursing the strings in silence as his bow hovers, suspended by constellations painted across Sistine ceilings. The sound pulses around him, a cathedral cacophony of love and life and emotion. Oakmoss and orange flowers spilling from his pores. He waits—just long enough for the notes to mature upon his tongue, before he's relaxing in a stream of crimson, setting the violin back down in its case. His fingers twist at the bow, all the tension falling loose of him as the hairs relax.

"How *dare* you," George hisses, all ice and disgust and briar fingers mottling blue enough to snap off. Lost to a grey Arctic storm forever. Dream feels his lips quirk upwards as George approaches, crackling with frigid energy.

"You didn't like it?" he asks, feigning naivety.

"I hate your playing."

"And I love that I hate you," he whispers across George's skin just to watch the way he shudders. "I love that you hate me too, concertmaster."

He pulls George's chin towards him with a strong hand at his jaw, coaxing his face forward until their lips ghost tantalisingly close. "Shall I confess something to you?" he asks, only for George's ears. Sick and twisted, that he's here spilling his soul out to the person who cares the least for it, who would throw it off the side of a skyscraper given half the chance. But that's the reason he does it, because falling is exhilarating.

"What?"

"I hated the concert. You told me to perform my best, and I didn't. I'm sorry," he says, and he means it. He's sorry he couldn't play well enough to make George scream under the crushing weight of blasphemy, sorry he only snapped one of his strings instead of all four, sorry the notes came out with intelligible beauty. "Nobody hated it, nobody looked at me in fear. I failed."

"It must be difficult for you, to be loved by everyone you perform to," George cuts, cold and biting.

Dream leans forward until his voice curls around the side of George's head. "Not quite everyone." His fingers wrap around George's wrist, marvelling at the way his bones swell like river rocks hidden beneath a slow current. "You don't love me. You'd put me six feet under, if you wanted. And you can. I'm still figuring out why you haven't," he breathes, because he knows George could *destroy* his life if he snapped his pretty fingers, cast him right out of the music world so he couldn't blight it any longer.

Autumn leaves decay, pounded into the road by heavy footfall.

"That would be immoral."

"Right." Dream has to admit, George might be detestable, with his perfection and pretentious smiles and his superiority complex, but he's fucking consistent in his hatred for illicit matters.

Which is why his tendency to flit to Dream, a moth to a flame, is so baffling.

It's inevitable when he leans forward to suck purple underneath George's jaw, a routine they've been perfecting over the last few weeks whenever George appears on his doorstep, wings coming a little looser every time. Their clothes are abandoned. Dream doesn't care where they end up. He's not careful about pushing George onto the bed, enjoying the way his eyes widen in surprise as his head collides with crumpled sheets. They widen further when Dream inches downwards, breath ghosting over hollow ribs, heavy heart, hips hewn from granite.

He kisses with his teeth rather than his lips, because that would be dangerously close to something much more confusing. George doesn't mind. His thighs tremble when Dream bites at them, when he sucks red over and over until he's certain he's about to break skin. Slender hands knot in his hair, pulling hard even though he knows it'll only result in a heavy palm across the swells of him, cracking loud in the rainy quiet of Dream's studio apartment. Lightning strikes. The lines of them are illuminated for a split second, exposing debauchery with stark brightness.

Dream's feeling gracious today. He spits into his palm, hyper sensitive to the way it makes George tighten, hazy eyes following his venom as it runs down his fingers. His hands tug at George's cock, thumb pressing over the head with every rough movement of his wrist, sending dark eyelashes to flutter over red skin. And every time George bucks a little too hard, hips chasing desperately for release, Dream sits back on his heels and stops.

With George keening for him, pink lips parted as he begs and begs Dream to *fuck him*, he's struck with an idea. Because George looks so perfect like this, with flyaway hair and vibrant cheeks, taken apart by Dream's hands and not a scrap of willpower to put himself back together again.

His fingers knot in dark hair and pull, pull and pull until George is sitting upright, head falling forward upon a limp neck. A whine escapes him. Confusion passes over his face as he watches Dream ascend from the bed, towering in imposing darkness, devil fingers reaching for the strad because he's been struck with heaven sent inspiration, lightning buzzing over his skin. Hell's advocate.

George seems to realise what he's doing and shakes his head, hard. "Put it down," he whispers, syllables tremoring with frenzy.

Dream shakes his head, smile growing. "Play," he says, pushing the violin into George's trembling hands.

"I- I can't," George whispers, fingers curled loosely around the neck of it, shaking in ripples of moonlit water. Opal, translucent. "Dream, *I can't*."

"Play the cadenza for me, concertmaster. *Now*."

"I can't-"

"Then I'll leave you like this," he says, arms crossing over his chest. "You can play, or I'll never let you cum again. How does that sound?"

George shivers. His chin rests against the darkwood, arm tensing as he lifts it to cradle the neck. Gentle, balanced. He looks like he's relearning how to hold a violin, as though he's forgotten which string is which, as though he's forgotten where each position is and where to place the bow. Dream almost wants to help him, wants to wrap his fingers around George's and direct him to the opening like he's learning to play an a major scale. Wrists gripped tight enough to snap.

“Shit,” he murmurs when George allows the bow to glide, to saw out notes dripping in stomach acid. His fingers struggle to articulate like usual, carried forward by muscle memory alone. There’s no stream of consciousness behind those eyes, every coherent thought tipped right over deck to decay at the bottom of the fucking sea, only crashing tide left to guide George through each passage.

And fuck, it’s so *raw*.

Dream’s throat is trampled like petals into damp asphalt, sweet oil flowering in his chest as George strings dirty notes together. He’s finally stepped out of the clouds, allowed the rain to wrap around his limbs and play for him, the tempests and monsoons to blow through curved sound holes and come out smelling of thunderstruck violence.

Tears brim against red rims as he’s playing. Lips twist with horror, awestruck at how disturbed it all sounds, with Dream drinking and drinking the sound of his sin. George hazards a glance at him while he’s performing, eyes wide and sorrowful like he wants to stop, but ultimately finds himself addicted to the way the notes sound when they’re snapping against an unforgiving sidewalk.

He takes the violin from George once he’s finished, tucking it safely back into its case and slamming the lid. Ambrosia courses through his veins, easing the pain of joyful auditoriums and concert halls full of devotees. Because he’s taken George and cracked the shell to reveal his bare insides, all his clammed emotion spilling out across the rocks in a symphony so unique Dream can barely believe it’s fucking real.

“Didn’t that feel good?” He asks, pulling George’s chin upwards in a firm grip. Glassy eyes blink at him, soft lips trembling as if George is murmuring a prayer, a sacred mantra, over and over again to erase his sin.

“I hate it,” George chokes, and the words die like a swallow shot out the sky. His cheeks shine even as he leans in closer to Dream, shoulders trembling under the weight of the heavens even as they cast him out for what he’s done. “Fuck you fuck you *fuck you*,” he cries, nails running over Dream’s arms, too softly to draw blood. Too gentle to even mark, too gentle to have any effect on Dream.

“Poor baby,” he says, tugging at George’s hair so he can look at his masterpiece.

Debauched, tears drying all over pale skin in streams of encrusted diamond. Raw, uncut and beautiful. There are no facets here for the light to bounce and multiply upon, nothing manufactured in a junior music academy with tuition fees more expensive than his goddamn rent to over-sharpen the notes. No diplomas with gold lettering, no cathedrals with baroque notes spilling from frescoed ceilings. Dream has finally peeled it back, left himself with a construction of raw sinew and trampled magnolia petals.

With tears pooling at the apex of his chin, Dream thinks George might be irrevocably beautiful for the first time.

“You look pretty like this,” he says when George’s head falls forward onto his shoulder, released from his hold. “I like it.”

George sobs. “I hate you.” His fists whack against Dream’s chest, once, twice, before they fall into his lap. Open-palmed, spent. Shoulders curling in shame, reviled at what he’s just done. Bile dripping from his words, like he would rather throw up his soul than play another broken note. “Why did you make me do that? Why?”

Dream laces their fingers together, marvels at how freezing George is against him. “I didn't make you do anything,” he murmurs into soft hair. “That was all you, pouring your emotion into the music for once. It sounded good, darling. It sounded *interesting*.”

“You-” George hiccups. “You knew I wouldn’t be able to play it right, you- you knew.”

His lips curl wickedly. “Exactly.”

“I wish you’d *die*.”

Dream tuts, a hand drifting down to ghost over George’s ass, a looming threat. “I’ll make sure you can’t sit in first chair for a week if you keep that up,” he says evenly. He rubs in slow circles, barely touching so George will push back into it, so he’ll look up at Dream with those glassy eyes and beg him to *slap*. So he’ll cry tears of frustration, so he’ll turn cherry pink and beg to sit on Dream’s cock.

“I don’t deserve to sit in first chair.”

“Oh, baby. It sounds like you’re giving up,” he says, reaching instead for George’s cock. He shudders when Dream rubs a thumb over the head, when he tugs at it despite the salt covering their skin. Breathless gasps escape him, broken and bruised. “Let me take your mind off it, yeah? You want to relax?”

A pause, before George is nodding, fingers curling uselessly against unrelenting arms. He fucks into Dream’s palm, hips rolling in ruined circles. It’s messy, it’s addictive, and Dream is absolutely drunk on the way it feels to have broken him at last. The stave lines become barbed wire knots. “Slap, please, please,” George begs, begs and begs with raw syllables.

Dream swears his world stops as he takes in George, red eyed and begging for Dream to *hit* him for what he’s done. “Here?” he asks, rubbing a thumb over pale swells of flesh. Fingers brushing towards his hole, just to feel the way he arches back into it. “You want me to hit you here?”

“Yes, yes. There.”

“Why?” He squeezes hard, drags his nails over skin until George is keening, until he’s squirming against Dream. Pressing into old bruises, pushing down so they’ll sting.

“Because I played so, so horrid—because I don’t deserve to ever play again,” he murmurs, face shoved into the crook of Dream’s neck.

Dream brushes his free hand through his hair, drags blunt nails over his scalp before it drops to rest upon a narrow waist. He squeezes tight, pulls George close against him so he can’t possibly squirm away. George seems to realise this, hips canting into nothing as a heavy arm cages his form. Rim teased by rough fingers. And he arcs towards all of it, whines loud across Dream’s skin as he pushes his ass backwards, begging for the impact, begging to be slapped so hard he’ll never be able to touch a violin without thinking about this, without thinking about the ache of Dream’s palm as it mottles his skin to red. “Please,” he whispers, as one might whisper into clasped hands.

“No.”

“What?” George looks up at him with lightning across his brow.

“No. You played well,” Dream says. His thumb rubs *breves* into the skin stretched across George’s hip, over pearl bones and quartz marrow. Lips pressed to his face, candlelit reassurances murmured into his temple. “You played so well, I didn't know you had it in you. I didn't know

there was a soul in that frozen heart of yours.”

It’s horrid, it’s repulsive, because he has his arms wrapped around George’s waist as if they’re in a lovers’ embrace. Sun warmed marble, an eclipse of pure hatred. George is delicate in his hold, grasping at his shoulders like Dream is the only thing tethering him to this world, the only thing preventing him from stepping back onto his never-ending staircase. He tries and tries to climb it, ascending towards the sky in search of divinity. His muscles must be exhausted.

George plays with all the sky’s brightness at the best of times, clouds carved to perfection, endless expanses of Elysium stretching out mile by uninteresting mile. The grass sways in moon cadence, measured and exact. But Dream’s witnessed the storm now, seen stratus clouds phase to grey, crackle angry nimbus until they upend their contents to wash the city with baptismal water. And it’s maddening, because George could stand in the eye of the hurricane if he wanted, an angel of ice and blizzard and heaven-sent thunder, but instead he turns his nose up in eloquent defiance. Fades into the shadows, merges with the masses. Lost to urban sprawl.

Dream’s chest aches, and he’s not sure why.

Arctic bluster swells between his ribs when he pulls George closer, closer, staring over his shoulder with dejection. Rain dashes tear tracks across the window. Streetlight reflects in each and every rivulet, honey gold and fluorescent yellow spilling into the dinge of Dream’s studio to paint them with shades of star crossed amber.

It takes him a while to realise George is shivering, trembling in his arms like a leaf tossed into the wind, drifting above buildings, a soul freed by waterlogged lungs and crushed tracheas. He’s clinging so hard to Dream it should be pitiful, frail fingers frozen by the grey sea. And it’s confusing, because he should be raking his nails hard enough to draw blood, should be battering loose fists into the side of Dream’s face, should be cursing him for everything he’s done to ruin the most perfect composition of all. George is forged of angular notes, airy melodies, and now he’s been debauched like everything else Dream plays.

“You’re freezing,” he mutters.

“No, I’m alright.”

“George, you’re *shaking*,” he says, shifting around to pull his blankets free from the end of the bed. They trail orange blossom and conifer, citrus and sunshine and hot asphalt.

He wraps George with blue yarn and sets him down on the mattress with harmonic pressure, balancing on the string just gently enough to produce ephemeral notes. Dark hair floods across the pillow. The storm drains overflow. George blinks up at him with an expression marred with confusion, because Dream is supposed to be mauling him with strawberry red, pomegranate juice spread over his skin as blood rises to the surface. He’s supposed to be sharp and biting, uncaring of the swarovski beading upon pale cheeks.

Instead he’s wrapping him with blankets and crumpled sheets. Instead, he’s pushing dark hair from a cold forehead.

“Don’t you want me to leave?” he asks, drawing the blanket tighter around his torso. That’s what normally happens—George vanishes into the night, cast aside once Dream’s done with him and his expensive fingers, swollen lips, white stained thighs. Dream isn’t sure he has a rational explanation as to why he’s staring down at him now, softening cock and all. If he allows his thoughts to wander too much, he can imagine George lying there on a Monday morning, in the middle of the week, as evening falls before the weekend. A blight, a scourge, a cacophony of bloodthirsty doves.

But Dream's always liked broken things.

"You can't leave right now, concertmaster," he says after a moment. He reaches over the side of the bed to pull some clothes on, staving off the chill of the apartment building with all its gaps for the draft to blow through. "I don't care if you have a *driver*, okay? Stay put for a while."

"Okay," George whispers eventually, eyelids drooping towards sleep. His voice is softer than usual, smudged around the edges with something confusing, something which ushers thoughts of grand fireplaces, hardwood tables laden with chalices of christmas wine, marble entrance halls which smell of home. Dream hates hates hates it, but a pitiful little part of him leans closer, a blind moth to the light.

He resumes his evening as George sleeps in the centre of his bed, knees tucked up into his chest. Fingers bare of crest rings, face vacant of rounded glasses, the smell of orange sticking to him in place of orris.

An angel lies on the face of the earth, perfectly broken from the fall.

Chapter End Notes

before i start ranting i am begging you to look at this [art](#) :) it's so cool

ao3 user ffonippop i'm sorry there was no piss in this chapter :(maybe next time <3

also uh hi o/ i wrote this fic - the one or two people who guessed i'm literally going to kiss you on the mouth. if you missed the [playlist](#) well hi i shoved all the songs dream vibes to in one place so that's fun! and violin shit! agh! (it's soooo incohesive it's a mess) anyway sorry this took a while, i have exams and shit. also thank u to [moon](#) and [bitter](#) for checking whether dream was too much of a cunt in this, he definitely is but thank you for lying to me anyway :) once i am enabled there's just no stopping. see u guys soon hopefully!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

there is one thing in this chapter which sounded really unrealistic to me (like, more than all the other unrealistic things), so I am here to tell you I have trawled through the incredibly 100% reliable source of quora dot com and now I feel more validated about it. please don't call me out like I was with the strad help it makes george sexier and I will not take criticism on him walking around with 3 mil on his back

(this is all light-hearted that was fucking hilarious to me)

also this fic was supposed to be 20k total but i got so fucking carried away as you can see

anyway let's go

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George disappears for good this time.

Sure, he sees him in college buildings on occasion—Juilliard isn't exactly the largest student body in the country. Sees him emerging from soundproof practice rooms with pink cheeks and blown irises, and it drives Dream up the fucking wall because he *knows* what George does to himself in order to look like that. Whenever it happens, they glance at each other for a split second before George hurries away from his darkness, bottom lip sucked between his teeth. Disappearing behind his stupid old money coat, violin case secured across his back. Orris trailing after him.

It smarts like skin against skin, the bite of angry hands against bruised apple flesh.

Just when he's managed to lead George out of Elysium, just when he's turned back to drink in what he's done like ambrosia, George is gone. He's left with hands grasping at empty air, a bleeding hole in his side where he's pulled the thorn out of it.

He knows George hates him. He's known George hated him ever since they met, with biting remarks whispered behind languages he doesn't know, crested fingers and side glances. He's known George hated him for years. But George has never looked like *this*, with the tundra melting right off him every time he brushes near Dream.

More than anything, he attempts to take his mind off a pretty face and prettier whining, long neck stretched across his pillow as the headboard knocks into the wall metronomically. Dream sleeps with violinists he hates less than George, violinists he despises because of it. He forgets about them as soon as they're across his threshold, eyes flickering over the ceiling cracks as if he wishes to tumble right through them into the void. Hands crossed over a bare stomach, heather grey spreading its roots across his chest.

He'll reach for his phone, thumb at the sides of it for a while as he considers giving in.

But perhaps the day is too close to the horizon, perhaps he tells himself it'd be too much like admitting defeat if he told George to see him again. So he doesn't. He lies in wait, curious as to

how long George can hold out before his morbid attraction to Dream flares up, how long he can pretend Dream doesn't exist before he's on his doorstep begging him to play another concerto, clasped hands and prayers bubbling upon his lips.

Dream isn't so sure he could. With George filling up his mind with sickly nectar, with wilting iris and gentle dove feathers, he finds himself unable to conjure his world of hellfire, to step into a black river and string snapped notes together like he's done so many times before.

And it's fucking terrifying.

He realises all of this when he's invited to perform at a recital. The prospect of redemption, of playing to an audience and watching their faces turn ashen sets molten rock seeping into his veins, heart thrumming under the immense pressure of it.

It's a Saturday, and he's thumbing through manuscript paper before he practises, theory books strewn over his desk with the spines cracked and eraser dust spilling out of the pages. He'll deal with his classes later. The urge to play overtakes him, even as he's tightening his bow with sleepy fingers and the fluorescent glow emitting from the offices across from him filters through his window. Dream doesn't like how enclosed practise rooms are, how they tend to remind him of starlit cheeks and pink lips wrapped around his cock.

Even so, his room isn't much better.

There's a dip somewhere in his mind long after the dip in his mattress vanishes, the outline of George's limbs condemned to memory. He wishes it would fade like the smell of him, wishes he could climb into the washer like a blanket and scour him from every thread of his being.

Biting back a curse because George refuses to leave him alone even when he's physically absent, Dream lifts the violin to his shoulder, flutters his fingers over the strings and utters a prayer or two that it'll be better this time. He's trying to pick something for the recital, something he can bend to his will and cremate when every single one of its bones are snapped. His bow only begins to move when he commands it. Then he's thrown overboard into a coldwater sea, the only thing he has to look at being the grey expanse of sky stretching over his head.

The last notes fall flat in front of him, premature larvae which don't have the right sentience to become a swarm of hornets. Alkaline shame stings his face. His spool is running away from him, unravelling the core parts of his being as easily as fateful breeze snatches loose thread, tangles it into knots and ties it to the wrong people just to watch them flounder. He yanks and yanks in the hopes it'll snap, but it never does. It bends around street corners, leading to something just out of his grasp.

He looks down at his fingers, and is disconcerted to find every vein and tendon is exactly the same. It wouldn't be so bad, if he were to wake up in a stranger's body, a stranger without the curse of his blessing bestowed upon them. But these are his hands, and they won't obey. Betrayal burns away under his skin, fiery tongues lapping at the cracked surface hot enough to scald.

Dream doesn't know what to do with himself.

He dials his music back up, head dropping into his hands with the sort of weariness which accompanies being trapped at the bottom of a well, and he isn't sure whether it's even possible to

climb back out. If he were to try, he'd only end up with grazed palms and broken ankles. So he sits, knee deep in stewing water, disconnected thoughts bouncing off the inside of his skull, bleached white with piercing sunbeams.

Blue light washes over his face when he opens his laptop. His fingers flex over the keys. Drafting an email to get out of playing a solo is laughable, because he's *Dream* and he can play any repertoire without his stomach turning over at the prospect of fucking the notes up. Dream doesn't care about that. A little risk doesn't frighten him. But the monster under his bed isn't a monster at all—rather, it's a hazy cloud of numbing gas, saccharine and pleasant and as grey washed as the winter sky.

Beneath it all, his last audience haunts him, with their adoration and astonishment.

So he clings to the image of George instead, George with his lip curled, George hissing every time Dream's palm connects with his skin, George using half the insults under the sun to describe his playing with frozen eyes. Whatever warmth that image generates is expelled by the frosty bite of absence, a grim reminder that George seems to have learnt to float through walls and turn translucent just to avoid him. Then again, perhaps he's always known how to do that. Perhaps he stopped wanting to exist in the same realm as Dream.

*Once in a while
Then you take me down
Then you walk away*

The rain turns white as the weeks rush towards the end of the year, and Dream doesn't see George. He considers that George has boarded a flight already, fingers curling around first class champagne as he lies amongst the clouds. But that can't be right. George wouldn't return home early, not when his eyes sparkle with dread whenever Dream manages to make him talk about it, even if all evidence suggests otherwise.

Dream's had enough. With his cheek pressing into a coffeestained desk and his eyes flitting over the brick wall two metres away from his window, broken up by office blinds pulled tight across opposite windows, he decides he's going the fuck home on the first day of Winter Recess. Sapnap will drive to see him like he's done ever since he got his license, and it'll be enough for him to clear his head.

He just has to hope the teeth of the conservatory don't chew him to chunks of plastic wrapped meat first.

There's nothing from George. He packs enough to last him the entire break and abandons his studio, back firmly turned when the door slams behind him. The door locks with metallic finality, and he decides he's not going to think about him while he's at home.

Wishing these sorts of things into reality never fucking works.

"I'm not the fucking Black Death," he complains to Sapnap, without the scalding heat of his irritation confined to four inches of glass and aluminum which begs him to bend and break. Smoke rushes from his lips. They're sitting at the edge of his driveway, and the cloud cover is too oppressive to allow any sunlight through.

He feels like a kid again, free of pristine manuscript paper gleaming jade in blue veined hands. Without his world of ivory and crystal and violins whispering with the ghosts of bygone centuries, Dream sheds the layers of weathered skin he has to cloak himself with in order to withstand the high altitude. It should be disconcerting, but with the curb pressing uncomfortably into his ass and his hands shoved under his arms, he stops cowering away from the sky as though it's a magnifying glass. His soles rasp along tepid asphalt, each *scrape scrape scrape* the exact opposite of flowing legato.

"Have you texted him?" Sapnap sounds sick to death of this by now, which is sort of saying a lot. He thrives on poking at Dream, but he claims his obsession with George has become a little tragic at this point. And perhaps it's odd for Dream to be sitting on the curb outside his parent's house with his best friend forced to listen to him whining about a violinist with far too much influence in his slender hands, but he thinks he'd quite literally combust if he kept it locked away any longer.

"No. Wouldn't make a difference, he's so far up his own ass he can't even--"

"You're doing the thing again," Sapnap cuts him off.

"What thing?"

"The thing where you pretend to hate George, but you wanna kiss him *so* bad," Sapnap says, bottom lip stuck out to mock him, syllables all elongated and dripping with exhaustion. "How do you even get into shit like this? 's fucked."

"I don't want to kiss him. I hate him."

Sapnap groans into the cup of his hands, fingers pushing into his hairline. "Oh you *hate* him so much you think about him every fucking minute of every fucking day. You think about him more than lovers think about each other. Doesn't that sound like obsession?"

Dream drags long and hard, inhaling all the way to the pits of his lungs to scratch the invisible itch residing at the bottom of his being. Smoke spills from his lips when he speaks, before dissipating in December air. "I just wish he'd stop pretending like nothing happened. I made him play so fucking pretty, so *perfect*, least he could do is show some goddamn gratitude."

"I dunno. You were pretty mean to him, he probably hates you even more now."

Dream isn't sure why that particular prospect shoves his heart in a horizontally zippered plastic bag, cushions the bloody sides of it with iron weights, and casts it into the Hudson, but he despises the feeling of sinking. His knees come up to his chest. Bone juts into his cheek, but it's not uncomfortable enough to make him move, world tilted sideways on its axis as he stares off down the street he's supposed to be familiar with.

"I want to see him play again," he admits. "I want to see if he remembers how good it feels, to set fire to manuscript paper and watch it burn to ashes."

Sapnap rolls his eyes skywards in a way he only can because he's used to all of Dream's theatrics. "C'mon, I drove way too fucking far just to listen to you whining about him. Can we watch a

movie now? 'm sick of all your violin politics. There's a reason I didn't go to fucking music school, christ."

"You could've flown here."

"Yeah, but then I wouldn't be able to complain so much."

Dream leans down to grind a cig into the asphalt, entranced by the gentle phase of orange to emptiness. Sapnap's had years to perfect the art of walking the fine line between annoying Dream and lifting his spirits, but sometimes he really questions the effectiveness of his methods. "I hate you more than I hate George."

"That's blatantly untrue." Sapnap's face sours, nose wrinkling as he considers the implications of that particular concept. "You'd be fucking me by now if you did, which...no offense, but--"

"Okay, I get it. I'm in love with George, whatever."

"Finally! Now you can honeymoon in fucking Paris or something, whatever it is people like him do on their off weekends. And feel free to keep me entirely out of the loop on your sex life, by the way. I don't wanna hear it."

"I was kidding."

He narrowly avoids Sapnap's hands around his neck.

He's practising in the middle of the night when it comes up again. The kitchen is dark around him, and he's sitting on the counter with his heels connecting with the sides of it every now and again, violin set down for the time being. Sliding doors propped open, aquamarine lighting caressing his bare feet. It's perfect because the room juts out from the side of the house, square windows set into the ceiling so he can watch the stars pass over him with unseeing irises. His parents are heavy sleepers, but he figures there's less risk they'll hear him if he's in here.

The floor is cold against his soles when he pushes himself off the worktop, opening notes of the concerto solidifying in his mind as he reaches to retrieve his violin. He's played them a thousand times. But when he allows his bow to drift, all he can think about is the red numbers glaring at him from the microwave, gurgling pipes, tiles designed to stay cool during Florida summers.

And then the chill pressing to his skin is transforming into an effigy of iris and vanilla, of ice and snow pallor and glacial whines as Dream edges George within an inch of his life. Melted crystalline carving his cheeks. The flat of his tongue pressing against Dream's fingers, lips sucking diligently on whatever he's feeling amicable enough to provide. Teeth needling at his cock, regret pooling at the backs of his eyes when it ends with a palm connecting with his cheek, crimson webbing to denote the impact.

He stops playing. The violin remains under his chin, but there's something wrong about the way the notes come out, and some hidden part of him knows he can't continue to blame it on low ceilinged practise rooms, the way the sun struggles to enter his studio apartment.

Light spills over him as the door is cracked open, unwanted eyes peering into his bubble of discontent.

"Go away," he manages, voice dragged over childhood asphalt like tender knees and soft palms. Red grazes which don't hurt much in reality but incite the naive rage of a creature who has yet to experience everything wrong with the world.

Sapnap closes the door behind him, and the rest of the planet ebbs away once more. He's reminded of shadowy backstages, apartments darkened by storm clouds even though it's late afternoon, practise rooms veiled with secrecy. Even so, the light persists when Sapnap speaks. A breathing representation of everything beyond claustrophobic stave lines and the Styx as it empties over his head, nuclear fallout subsiding for a little. "Dude, you're playing weird."

"Weird?"

"You're playing like death. And not the bloody murder kind of death. More like flatlining."

Dream huffs a laugh of disbelief. "Thanks for the confidence boost."

"Well, you know what they say about violinists dying twice." The first being the most unthinkable—when the last note is played, when the violin is returned to the case and never picked up again. And it's impossible to know when it's coming.

"No. I'm still playing." He glides his bow across the strings with his left hand a dead weight by his side, violin supported only by his chin. It's pedantic and he knows it. The opening four notes of Twinkle Twinkle sound strangely ominous when he's standing in the same room he first learnt them, except he's years and years older and he feels just as lost as he did when he didn't know his A from his E.

"Yeah, and you can play *well*, it just sounds weird, that's all. It's not you, y'know?"

Dream sighs and sets the violin down, wondering if the case looks a little more like a coffin than usual. "You only notice because you fucking play violin. Nobody else cares."

"Okay, Dream. We'll just pretend like he's not on your mind. But figure something out, because I can't stand to listen to you play like everyone else."

And that's the kicker.

"Like everyone else?"

"Yes. It's boring."

Scales press against his trachea, pointed edges coaxing blood to the surface as it tightens and tightens with every breath. Fire burns him now, venom stops his heart. The world of his own creation is turning upon him, casting him through wrought iron gates to crawl across the deadland of mediocrity, tongue dry against the roof of his mouth and skies empty of porcelain angels. Music flows from his fingers in lullaby melodies, twinkling nursery rhymes.

Sapnap knows him much too well. His violin is taken by hands rougher than his own, a physical reminder that the scars he acquires from braving the wolves residing in conservatory exist in his

mind alone. Perhaps that's why it's so laughably simple to unravel him.

"It's late," he says, removing the shoulder rest from the back of the thing. "And it's fucking cold in here, too. Why do you have the door open?"

"Too hot."

"It's December." Sapnap crosses through the darkness to pull at the door until it gives, sliding back into place so the numbing hum of the outside falls silent. A part of Dream's consciousness yawns deep and long, despising the prospect of returning to college, where there's barely enough room to breathe and he passes his time by fucking half the first violin section. If they didn't hate him already, they definitely do by now.

"I don't wanna go back."

"You can't stay here forever."

"Why," he whines, shuffling towards the couch and collapsing onto it. It's misshapen in the most familiar way, molding to fit his body within an instant, motherly hands wrapping around him to whisk away violins and sheet music and dead composers who are most likely turning in their graves as he defiles their music.

"You're too far in now. Think about how much money you'd be wasting if you dropped out."

"Fuck, you're right."

He vaguely registers Sapnap sitting across from him, reliant on the sound of socked feet rasping over tile because his eyes have slipped shut of their own accord. Dream is fucking exhausted.

"Well, I think you're dumb as all hell. I think you know that, too."

Sleep tugs at him. Gravity seems too much for his weary limbs, low hanging boughs which trail off the edge of the couch and dip towards the fiery core of the earth. And he knows Sapnap is right, because every time he closes his eyes he's haunted by ghostly fingers and butchered Sibelius, and night delirium is making him think too hard about tasting George's tongue.

"Okay," he hums, all slurred together. "If I see him, I'll talk to him."

"Thank-fucking-God."

Dream is many things—a dick, an asshole, some guy with an ego so big his head should be considered the eighth wonder of the world just for withstanding the sheer size of it. He makes people see red, and revels in doing it. But he's not a liar, at least not when Sapnap's involved.

It erodes a piece of his soul when he's standing in front of a noticeboard, affronted with a rehearsal schedule in tiny text so everything will fit onto one page. Trawling through the list of orchestra

rehearsals spreads relief through him, because he'd despised how pointlessly early they'd always seemed to start. He doesn't want to see George at nine, when his eyes are sharp with morning and his fingers articulate more precisely than usual.

So he's feeling pretty fucking pleased with himself, until he sees what repertoire is actually on the spring programme. His knuckles bleed white. The corridor flickers out of existence for a moment as he draws in a shaky breath, wondering why the universe must test him so much.

But he has a class to attend, so he shoves his newfound knowledge to the back of his mind and drains the remnants of his coffee, cup bouncing off the inside of the trash.

It comes to fruition the next time he manages to glimpse George for long enough to be certain he's not imagining him, dark hair floating off down the corridor towards blue January streets. And Dream isn't a liar, so he walks faster, violin case jostling unpleasantly against his back.

"Concertmaster!" he calls down the hall. Students he's never bothered to learn the names glance at him, mild irritation melting to unease when they realise it's Dream, with his bloodstained fingers and bitter tongue.

Narrow shoulders tense, and then George is turning towards Dream, and he's having a difficult time fully understanding the implications of it. Dream hasn't spoken to George in weeks, not since he'd pushed a violin into shaking hands and commanded him to *play*. Not since he'd wrapped George up in a blanket and set him down in the centre of his bed, pushed hair off his forehead and desperately tried to ignore the way George's eyelashes fluttered. He's not entirely sure what to say to him.

I hate you.

Play for me again.

I can't stop thinking about you.

I hate that I can't stop thinking about you.

"Why the fuck is Sibelius 2 on the programme?" he asks instead, forcing the words out quickly so his tongue can't betray him. "The spring programme, why is the orchestra playing that symphony?"

"I don't choose what we perform--"

"Bullshit," he spits, eyes narrowing with distaste. "You know as well as anyone what influence does, what dirty fucking money does. Are you doing it to annoy me, piss me off?"

"Dream, I have to go," George rushes, stepping closer to the vice leader. She glares at Dream as though he's just run over her fucking cat and eaten the entrails afterwards. Inexplicably, her fingers wrap around George's wrist to tug him towards the door, almost as if she's trying to shield him from Dream.

He should be amused by it, should bask in the way his stature sends conservatory students skittering away from him as torchlight makes money spiders withdraw into shadow, tiny legs and tiny bodies in peril. Instead he fills with emptiness, overpowering and oxymoronic. George is running away from him, rushing out into the grey blur of traffic rather than following the starlit passage through corridors which end in burning practise rooms. Ushered by the vice leader, who

glares at Dream like she *knows* something.

He dreads to think what it is.

“I don’t think you do. Tell me—why is it that you keep avoiding me? It’s not going to help.” Because it won’t do anything to remove the weight of George’s sin. He’s got Dream infatuated with the way he plays when he’s broken, of all people, and he’s a fool for trying to deny it.

“You should come. To the concert, I mean,” George hurries, with eyes which flit around Dream’s face like he’s not expecting to see him for a long while and needs to commit all of its detestable facets to memory.

Stop fucking running, Dream wants to say. *It won’t change that I’m better than you.*

He bites his tongue.

“Oh, so you want me around now?”

“It’s your favourite,” George mutters with desperation, as if it’s the last thing he’ll ever utter while he’s still underneath the sky.

“No.”

“No?”

“No, I’m not coming to your concert. Why would I do that? You can’t even look at me.” He eyes the way George is subtly being tugged towards the exit even as clear cut longing floods over every facet of him.

Parted lips press together, austere and calculated. George pushes his glasses back up the bridge of his nose where they’ve slipped downwards, gazing up at Dream through spotless lenses, all sorts of unsaid thoughts safely hidden by the moons of Mars. “Why did I...” he trails off, head shaking ever so slightly as he composes himself. “You’re an asshole.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“I’ll pay for you to go. I don’t care.”

“You’ll just be wasting your money,” Dream says even though George has more than enough, even though George uses it to cheat his way to first chair and slip pillow secrets onto concert programmes. Nobody is supposed to know about this, but a section of Dream’s heart is nailed to the noticeboard, naked and vulnerable with five inches of iron pierced right through it.

“Then go, and I won’t be.”

He receives a ticket a few days later, accompanied by George’s handwriting spiralling in pretty cursive, ink smudged because George is left handed, and he despises himself for knowing. It urges him to attend. Dream doesn’t particularly like being told what to do by people who don’t have the gall to look him in the eye.

The note crumples in his fist and rolls under his bed when he tosses it at the wall, a dejected little thing with enough power to set *his* voice loose in his mind. He stares at the ticket for a while, thumbing over delicate text and the prison bars running up the side of it. It’s representing

something, but he doesn't know what. It's certainly nothing good.

With a hazy thought process and two-faced hands, Dream ends up tucking the slip into his violin case, folding it in half so it'll fit alongside the round tin residing above the scroll.

He isn't entirely sure why. He tells himself he'll ignore it, he'll allow the day of the concert to slip right by him with the physical proof he's missing it tucked safely into a velvet covered compartment. But every time he plays, it stares back at him with linear eyes, a voice whispering from the bough of knowledge.

And perhaps he should've thrown the ticket right into the storm drain, watched its ink bleeding like damp lily petals as it drifted off in the gutter. But George makes him do all kinds of abnormal things, and he wishes he didn't recognise his face so much whenever he stares into the mirror.

Spring approaches, and sometimes it's sunny when he leaves college in the evenings. He believes it's a good omen.

It's a Friday, and he's trying and trying to perform like he used to, but it's difficult when light streams through the practise room window and floods his vision with March blue. He should be content that he's not shoved into one of the windowless boxes for once, but he's not particularly relieved to see cotton clouds drifting along the breeze. Music rips away under his fingers. Each page floods by in dull monotony, flocks of breves placating and stationary.

Dream briefly wonders, not for the first time, if George stole a part of his soul when he'd played the cadenza. Put it on a chain to keep around his neck, Dream's thrumming life force right between elegant collarbones. Left him with nothing. And now he's trying to keep it safe before Dream realises what he's done, attends orchestra rehearsals with beauty flowing from his violin and his fingers moving with knife sharpness. Such are the fairytales Dream tells himself to avoid an austere truth.

He replaces his violin with his phone, sitting on the table with his legs crossed.

His lockscreen glares at him, and there's something wrong about the date. It's presented in rounded white letters, matter-of-fact and apathetic, but his mind is full of gold embossment atop heavy paper with the pulp casting cream shadows, gentle script which lulls him to death.

The concert is today, he realises.

The concert is today, and he's told George he won't come, and the memory of dark eyes bruising like summer fruit has floated behind him ever since he'd said it. But he could see George play again, hide in the back of the concert hall with mandibles and venom, content with the knowledge it's a little too difficult to make out faces when affronted with bright stage light. George would never know. Dream lives and breathes music—there's nothing detestable about sitting under balconies and ceiling roses for a while, swimming in the tide of harmony.

So with the stride of a man half possessed, Dream finds himself stepping out into the corridor, leaving behind the blinding irritation pressing against windowless walls.

His shoulders fall as soon as he's embraced by the streets, because he doesn't have to walk around with his eyes ablaze if he's not being observed. City noise is a welcome diversion to stagnant melody. He's had far too much of that. Even the sting of sulfur doesn't bother him so much, not when he's surrounded by evening and nobody on the sidewalk gives a shit about his inability to play concertos.

Dream hates everything about entering concert halls, and this occasion is no different. He's left to sit at the very back where nobody can pay attention to him, shrinking into the shadows with weary eyes and slumped shoulders.

He's too late for the first half of the concert, but he doesn't particularly care. The programme he's holding between his palms tells him he's in time for what he's come for, and he's going to see George *playing* again in meagre minutes.

Sitting on this side of the stage doesn't feel quite right. It should be him sawing out raw notes, commanding tides of bewilderment as each bar flies past in a blur of crow navy.

He's out of place here, dressed in a shirt with the neckline stretched enough to dip to his collarbone. Tarnished silver disappears under the hem, loops around his neck. Part of him wishes he'd had time to rush back to his room, cover every flawed part of his skin with something half presentable, but he stops the thought in its tracks. It's disconcerting. Why should he give a shit if the people here look at him strangely? Isn't that what he's always wanted?

His feet kick up onto the seat just for good measure, and he begins to feel a little better about himself.

The lighting changes.

It's all the warning Dream is provided before the stage is filling up with a sea of black silk and eyes iced with concentration, each member of the orchestra illuminated by blinding white. His throat tightens. He runs a hand through his hair, and he's not certain why he's so anxious. He's not even the one performing, he doesn't have to worry about seeking approval from all these hundreds of eyes trained upon the stage, he doesn't have to worry about spilling blood over his strings and stabbing dead composers through the heart.

Iron coats his tongue anyway, and it's becoming impossible to deny how fascinated with his concertmaster he is.

Dream sits up straighter when George walks out. He has to crane his neck to see over the edge of the balustrade, and his feet fall to rest next to the stickered surface of his violin case. The pithy oxygen he has left sticks to the back of his throat, because even from this distance he's set ablaze by the ease of George's smile, imperfect angles and warmth that reaches the rest of his face for once. George looks like he's smiling as though he doesn't have an audience, forgetting all the ways in which he's been taught. It's strangely beautiful.

"Fuck," he mutters, jaw dropping to rest in an outstretched palm.

It only gets worse when George sits down, all soft hair and fitted black clothes and hands vacant of silver, long fingers flowing in unmarked marble columns. He's not wearing glasses. He doesn't like wearing them for concerts, Dream remembers, because the stage lighting refracts across the surface of them if he angles his head in a certain way. Easier to go without. As a result, he can just about

make out the perfect lines of his face, lips pursed in anticipation, fingers flutter over the neck of his violin and the frog of his bow. With one practised motion, it's under his jaw.

Dream isn't sure he fully understands what he's getting into when the baton raises, when the hall plunges into heady silence and the stage stops creaking.

A heartbeat, and it falls.

George plays like he's alive again, with lightning hands and his stance firmly in the eye of the storm. He's more refined this time, doesn't fumble runs or tremble when he reaches the tip of his bow like he did when he played the cadenza to Dream several lifetimes ago. But perhaps this is beautiful too. Perhaps this is beautiful, because his lips aren't pressed together in rigid concentration, and he's allowing the tide to pull him forwards rather than shuddering under the weight of it. He's not so afraid of retribution. Dream can see it in the way he soars, unhindered by the threat of sharp discipline.

George is playing for himself.

Saltwater brims over when the third movement runs headlong into the fourth, because Dream is transported back home again, a seventeen year old version of himself playing the same thing in an early summer evening. The smell of hot asphalt and orange, so real to him despite the conditions under which this symphony was written. A confession of the soul, dark and deep and perfect.

He remembers how it felt to sit amongst the swell of the tide, to forget about technicalities and focus instead on how it sounds. Dream would think of filament blown out by darkness, of soured marrow and limbs killed by hypothermia. The way panic sets in when dark ice closes overhead and lulls paralysed victims closer to the underworld, the way it spits them back out when they haven't sinned enough to enter Tartarus.

But this time, it's George, and everything's so much different.

Dream's fingers twitch, and he's aching to pull out his violin and perform. He's never known hell to freeze over, to blister with scalding coldness, but it's all he wants to think about, all he wants to pour into freezing music and chilled melodies. And it's horrible, that he's being inspired by the same thing he claimed sent him to sleep, sapped him of creative energy, but it's the undeniable truth. Something switches, and the light flicks back on in his head. In this moment, he understands he needs to wrap his fingers around slender wrists and hold on tight so his construction of hate and violence can't run away from him into the tundra again, can't leave him blindly fumbling in the middle of darkened suburbia.

The sea washes over his tongue. It beckons him to shore, pale lights shining from the beach to guide him back to icy land.

He stands when it's over, desperately hoping he can have George in his arms.

It's not difficult to find his way backstage after the concerhall has fallen silent. He stands at the back for a moment while he's leaving, entranced by the way silent rooms sound once the music has

drained out of them. The carpeted stairs are too clean against his soles. Chandeliers stick out of the ceiling, dripping with rain. Gold wraps his vision, and he's loath to leave a place of such high drama behind, but the promise of the concertmaster's face prompts him to skitter off into the web of twisting corridors, violin case in tow.

When he reaches the green room, George is the only one left inside, back turned to him and moonlight nape glowing half translucent. He's bent over his case, flipping the clasps hard enough they resound metallically.

"I'm sorry I didn't bring any flowers," Dream says, hands shoved deep into his pockets to disguise the way he aches to bite at his nails.

George's gaze snaps towards him, lips falling open in gentle spring blossom. Petals unfurling, opening their sweet flower throats to the sunlight as it drips honey over the horizon. His eyes are wide, and he's looking at Dream as if he's a mirage.

"You came."

"Of course. It's my favourite."

A pale throat flexes, dark irises tracking all over his face to pick out rainbow hallucination from the real and tangible. "You said you wouldn't come. I thought you wouldn't."

Dream steps closer, attentive to the way George follows every twitch and slight movement he makes. "I'm so happy I did," he says honestly, desperate to catch hold of freezing fingers. "You remembered everything I told you, didn't you? You remembered how it feels to play with no abandon."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

He suppresses the urge to roll his eyes, to give into spiteful fire and break George down a little more. But he doesn't think he wants to. "I love how you played it," he admits, and is surprised to find it doesn't scald him anymore. "You made me realise that maybe cold things are beautiful too, maybe some things don't need to be burnt to be destroyed. That's what makes us different. That's what makes us the same—how good it feels to kill and kill."

George doesn't speak for a while. He looks at Dream very hard, dark eyes submerged deep in consideration. It seems as if he's contemplating the layout of the universe, questioning to himself why the stars have aligned in such a way Dream is standing here in front of him, confessing his soul so earnestly it sounds dangerously like something else.

Eventually, he says, "ask me what I was thinking. Ask me what made me play like that, ask me what my inspiration was."

"What—"

"Please."

And even though Dream used to want to cast George overboard and watch his skull split upon sea rocks, he'd been curious to see what the insides looked like. There's a pearl of fascination rooted deep in his mind, he's sure of it. "What were you thinking about, concertmaster?"

"I was thinking about how much I fucking hate you. I hate you because you ruin music, you ruin everything."

“You’re not really talking about the music, are you?”

“No,” George whispers, lips pressed to a grille. “I’m not talking about music. I thought I was jealous of you for the longest time. And you made it so, so, easy to hate you instead, because you’re a prick, you realise? You’re horrible and arrogant and pretentious, you fucking hypocrite.”

“I don’t like entitlement.”

“But I was wrong,” he continues. “I realised I was wrong after you made me play that cadenza. I hate that I feel like...like *that*, and I hate that you’ll start ignoring me now you know. Now you know I’m just like everyone else. That’s the last thing you want, isn’t it?”

“You think I’ll grow tired of you if you’re not insulting me to my face?”

George thinks he’ll wrap him in blankets and toss him into the rain, chalk bleeding upon the sidewalk because there’s nothing left to ruin.

And isn’t that exactly what’s happened? There’s no lack of pretty violinists to warm his sheets, violinists who look a little too much like George, with their perfect bowing wrists and sharp chins and focused eyes. Subpar playing, over rehearsed melodies of pleasure. It’s a little too much like being shipped across the Atlantic, kept in a violin case unlike his siblings, cast aside as soon as there’s no use for him. George thinks it’ll happen again. Dream aches and aches, because he’s tried to run away first in order to prevent it, arms drawn tight around himself so he doesn’t have to live through burning rejection.

But none of those violinists play quite like George, fingers shaking with stimulation, saltwater pearls rolling over willow cheeks.

He wants him under clear skies as much as he wants him when it’s storming.

“George, you don’t fucking kiss my feet, you don’t talk to me like you’re praying. I *know* you understand my music, I know you’re just as fucked up as I am because you like it anyway. You played beautifully tonight,” he says honestly, all the air rushing from his chest when it makes George’s eyes cover with melted snow. “And that’s all that matters.”

He doesn’t want to break George anymore, because he has a feeling he’s already melted all his crystal to rivers of sucrose. George walks around with hellish spectres peering from his eyes, an adoration for *Dream* that inspires him to play and play and play with nothing but his heart and the callous movements of his hands, commanding tempests with every bowstroke just as his virtuoso taught him. They’re just the same, thrumming with understanding. With bitter devotion.

Dream doesn’t want to ruin his masterpiece.

“You’re so dramatic.”

“All soloists are dramatic, concertmaster.” His fingers reach up to brush along George’s jaw, feather bow strokes which send dark lashes fluttering over his cheekbones. It’s softer than he usually touches, absent of nails and teeth and firm palms. “It’s how we make art.”

“You think I could be a soloist?”

He hums under his breath, pulling George closer, closer, until dainty freckles begin to swirl together in a cauldron of static and lantern light. “No,” he says honestly. “Not if I’m around.”

“You’re a fucking asshole-”

George is cut off by Dream's lips against his own, protests dying right on his tongue in a burst of decaying apple flesh and wilting lilies.

He leans into it as a flower bends to sunlight, hands reaching up to burn ice across Dream's skin. Dream pulls him in by the waist, so so close his world begins to melt into Grecian columns by the sea and drifting iris and vanilla, delectable enough to make the clouds weep. Greying skies, storms ushered by pale fingers, pits of hellfire hissing under the rain. The collision of flame and icy sea is irresistible, complementary in all the best ways.

His tongue runs along George's bottom lip. Then they're deepening the kiss, addicted to the wet slide of their tongues, the way there's mind-numbing pressure as George's hips pull closer. Dream is growing light-headed, although he's not sure whether he's dizzy from the feeling of George's lips pressing against his own after so many months of sharp words, venomous teeth, barbed tongues, or if the screaming of his chest to breathe is a matter of reality.

Oxygen tastes sweeter than before. He pulls back to gasp lungfuls of it, delirious on everything that is George, this construction of icefire and blue skies. Hot lips bruise at his neck, sucking peonies below his jaw in cascades of spring rainfall.

"Come back to my apartment," George murmurs between kisses, bright hope evident in his expression.

Blood turns to lead, veins freezing over to stagnancy. Perfect jaw dividing into two, engineered to phase elliptical serpent eyes to black, the unassuming apex predator. Flying high enough to brush heaven with ivory wingtips. But for all his pretty features and demure smiles, George is *dangerous*, and Dream's never been more aware of it than he is now.

Dream is an oddity. Perhaps he'll end up in a tank of angel fish to be gawked at through spherical glass walls, perhaps he'll be diaphonized and left in a jar with red ink exposing every internal fault and flaw he possesses. Every burn he tries so desperately to hide. Or have his storm-battered skin filled up with excelsior, preserved for centuries like an old violin by taxidermist hands.

George notices the way he stiffens, attuned to jade scales rippling under long grass.

"It's close," he says by way of explanation. His touch is cold against Dream's cheek, intended to soothe the scalding heat which consumes him day by day, only intensifying when George is near. And he needs it to perform right, so perhaps it's a good idea to keep him around. "Closer than yours. We could walk there."

Walk into the lion pit.

"Are you...scared?" George asks in disbelief.

Dream swallows hard, aware of the way it clings to his throat with thorned sides and venus teeth, red green tongues leading to pits of acid. "No," he says, mostly to convince himself it's true. "Show me the way."

They're illuminated by amber and flickering strobe and starlight as George leads him through the streets, Dream's wrist in one hand and violin case in the other.

"I don't go out alone so much," he confesses, leaning in close so Dream can hear him over the

calling of night birds, covered in sequins rather than feathers. The hum of the undergrowth, exhaust fumes spilling between fauna and forest-floor beetles gazing with headlight eyes, radio antenna.

Dream laughs darkly. “What, because you need a driver? Because that pretty head of yours is too precious to risk?”

“Yes,” he breathes. “But it’s strange, I feel...I feel like nobody’s even looking at me.”

“That’s the magic of the city. Nobody gives a shit who you are, none of these people *care* that you just performed in the Carnegie. Isn’t that fucking addictive?” Dream tugs him closer, entranced by the way George is looking at everything like he’s seeing it for the first time without a layer of glass in the way, stars falling into his eyes and soles pressing into grime. “But you’re wrong, because I’m looking at you.”

Dark eyes snap to green, gentle lips turning upwards in satisfaction.

“Thank you. For everything.”

Entering George’s world is an unsettling mix of white floors and elevators which don’t complain when the cables are whirring, a key which doesn’t get stuck in the door when it’s turned, hallway lights which don’t flicker every time the wind blows too hard. The roof isn’t stained with water damage and the window frames don’t blow drafts over his face. It’s everything he was dreading. Dream has a collection of red crescents stuck into his palms even before they reach George’s apartment, and it only gets worse when he’s shown inside.

There’s colour, but it stays firmly within the lines, polite and subservient. George is setting his violin case down, the arc of his back supported by familiar surroundings and lowlight bouncing from unmarked walls, only to dissipate in honey tones. He stands in the doorway. Then he remembers George had no qualms about sticking his nose into Dream’s belongings, deciphering hidden planes of him with nimble fingers and sharp eyes, and crosses the threshold to examine the room.

Dream eyes the art nailed into the brickwork, stomach filling up with oil and sour green pigment at the prospect of joining them upon the wall. He can feel a curious gaze on his back, observing him as he observes in turn.

“They’re not originals,” George murmurs, shoulders snipped of their marionette strings now he’s not braving streets chilled by evening and watchful stars opening their eyes to observe and observe and observe. He glides over to Dream, blinking with dark lashes. “Wouldn’t that be far too indulgent?”

Anything might look indulgent in comparison to peeling Hole posters, chipped paintwork, window frames with gaps in the grouting large enough to send snowflakes cascading over his weary limbs. George looks oblivious to it all, accustomed to his fitted blinds and unstained floors.

He moves on, and isn’t able to mask his surprise when he sees the piano in the corner of the room, upright and piled high with music bound together by cracked spines. Briefly, he wonders how difficult it must’ve been to get it up here. More rationally, he supposes anything’s possible when George is the one behind it, considering he walks around with a violin aged to perfection and a diamond on his fifth finger.

“You play piano?” Dream asks, spreading his fingers out over a perfect fifth, then an octave. He pushes at the keys a little, slow enough they don’t sound, content to sun himself with the hum of late evening traffic and the rest of urban civilisation drifting through the open window. Music might ruin it.

“No, I have it for decoration,” George says sarcastically. “Can’t you play?”

Dream flicks through the stack of manuscript paper leaning against the wall, the corner of his lip quirking as he takes in elongated pencil strokes, circled notes, dynamics, accents. An eyebrow cocks upwards. “Not Liszt.” Limestone features draw his gaze again, tide against the rockface. “I didn’t know you had a second study.”

“What, you think I’m just a pretty face?”

“I never said you were pretty.”

“You didn’t have to,” George says, trilling with vanity. “All those violinists you fucked didn’t last long. You don’t even remember their names, do you?”

Dream doesn’t have an answer for that.

“You should play for me, concertmaster,” he says instead. His thumbs rub at the apexes of George’s jaw, coaxing ivory forward so the edges of his vision are framed with soft lily petals carried by the tepid breeze of springtime. Ebony eyes level his gaze, irises wide to combat the lowlight. Dream is standing upon the end of the pier, except it’s approaching witching hour and a violent whirlpool lies in wait for him. Something about it is a little like returning to the darkness of birth. “I’d like to listen.”

George exhales sharply. “I’m not like you. I don’t like whoring music out to anyone who wants to listen. Or doesn’t.”

“Because you’ve been put on a pedestal your whole life. Because you’re used to playing perfectly. But now you’re playing for yourself, and I want to listen.”

“You’ll have to earn it.”

“I know exactly how to do that.”

“Really.” George drifts out of his periphery, gliding through his echelon world as though he thinks nothing of it. Starlight glimmers across his cheekbones as he wraps long fingers around the neck of a bottle, hip pressed into the counter to steady himself. Dream is left with one elbow on the piano, fingers running pale paper instead of skin. The crinkle of discarded foil cuts the silence. White mist over glass green lips, delicate as wormsilk.

And then George sinks into the couch with a flute in each hand, at peace with his surroundings. It’s what sets them apart time and time again. It’s what makes him so aware of it. George has grown up in this strange world of etiquette and courtesy, and the way he ghosts as though moving across dimensions is cold evidence of it. Corporeal, intangible.

Dream steps in front of the window.

Regret courses over him as soon as he’s affronted with spotless glass, because there’s no grey brick a metre from his face, no eyesore ventilation systems, no office window directly across from him. The view opens out to nothing but night haze, and street level isn’t close enough. This is George’s realm now, with the sky dark against his splayed fingers and streetlight thrown at his face from

another dimension entirely, where people like him flutter cockroach wings, cannibalising each other to scrape along. Dream is an awful long way from the blistering heat of hell.

“Pretty,” he mutters to no one in particular, fingertips chilled by cool glass. He traces his index over caterpillar rows of trees, mechanical woodlice crawling along the street with their log of night to protect them from offensive brightness. There’s so much greenery in front of him, paid for with exactly the same colour.

“Dream.”

“Hm?” His gaze snaps away from the window, vertigo rolling over him with the force of the sea being sucked away from land before a tidal wave approaches.

“Sit down,” George says, running a thumb along the rim of his flute, stem balanced between two fingers. An identical glass is set on the coffee table, the colour of effervescent bile. “You look as though you’ll be sick.”

“I’m debating it.”

“Are you scared of heights?”

The version of himself dressed in Autumn leaves would never admit to it, would never take a scalpel to his chest and display his insides.

“Sometimes.”

“Then stop looking out of the window, idiot. You won’t realise it’s there if you do.”

George’s apartment could be worse, he supposes. If he forgets about the view, about the way the world opens out to a smoke coloured skyline, it might even seem normal, with folders of sheet music left out on the floor and candle wax stuck to the counters. There are cups in the sink. Pollution filters through the open windows, lulling his mind to comforting drain grey and steam white and subway amber. The irises on the sill are wilting, petals aching to rejoin the earth and decay to lilac ashes, but the ground is much too far away when he’s up here surrounded by soft music, foil topped bottles, and the prettiest fucking boy in the city.

He caves, and joins George.

His feet press against the couch, his elbow rests upon the back of it, and he’s holding a glass in his free hand because they’re the only actions in his power to make him feel more at ease. Golden contents drain quickly, until he’s left with warm humming in the bottom of his stomach. It’s worsened by George’s tendency to brush long touches all over his bare arms, his face, the insides of his thighs, as they murmur to each other.

When he sets the empty glass down, Dream loses the patience to sit in the middle of George’s apartment with pretty words flowing between them, conversations about the stars and the skies and how they might relate to symphonies. He takes George’s face in his hands and kisses him hard, pulling closer and closer as he memorises all the perfect ways to make his breath stumble over thin air.

They’re both hazy, and it’s lovely. George’s back collides with the upholstery, arching a little when Dream reaches his fingers up under silk, brushes against the bottom of his ribs with the same tangibility as a harmonic note. He shivers. His arms loop over Dream’s shoulders, hands pulling him closer with impatient tugs.

And the city rumbles on around them, oblivious to Dream's hands as they struggle to undress George, pulling at pressed linen with exuberant impatience. He succeeds eventually, and swathes of milk skin are curling with his gilded limbs, both of them completely bare like they've been so many times before. But it's different now, with Dream licking into George's mouth. With George's head tipping back, with thick fingers teasing ever so gently at his hole. Slicked with saliva, a result of Dream's dark desire to press down upon George's tongue and watch the way his lashes flutter across his cheekbones.

"Dream, stop," he whines, thighs trembling under featherlight touches. He whines more when Dream decides they're too unblemished and leans forward to suck supple skin between his teeth, thirsty for the sight of encrusted garnet when the morning rolls in.

He pulls back, aventurine eyes flickering over moonstone as he attempts to discern how George feels. Perhaps he's too fluent in the language of expression, because decoding George when he's not stringing notes together in pearl harmony seems an impossible feat. "What's wrong?"

"You're not fucking me on the *couch*."

The corners of his lips pull upwards. "You didn't seem to mind the practise room floor."

"That was different. That was...before."

His teeth graze along the slope of George's neck, barbed kisses alternating with the slow and gentle this time. When he speaks, his voice comes out lower than before, driven into the depths by George's breath against his face, George's mouth shining with glacé sin every time his fingers travel higher, higher. Ghosting over rose gems in champagne circles. "Before you realised you didn't hate me so much after all."

"Yes."

"Fine." Dream thinks all the things he wants to do to George would be best enjoyed with a cushioned headboard and pillows to collapse into afterwards anyway.

George begins to protest immediately when he's pulled into Dream's arms, but he quietens as soon as he's lying in the middle of his bed, narrow frame vignettied by white covers. They pillow to accommodate him, clouds supporting the slight form of heaven's favourite. Purple light is cast over his face from somewhere outside, matching the blueprints Dream stores in his head as soft thighs press into his cheeks, tensing with each bite and bruise. A tugging sensation needles at his scalp, and he fucking adores it.

Their surroundings bleed with darkness more often than not, aided by the steady drip of white grape thrumming through burgundy veins. They taste and taste, difficult to discern whether they're in love with each other or wine glimmering gold.

George's wrists are so easy to take hold of, to grasp in one hand and pin them above his head. He's more vulnerable like that, with his chest exposed to purple haze and the heat of Dream's exhalations, each one hot against his chest whenever they break apart. His lips fall vacant. He gazes down at George, gulps down the sight of swollen lips wet with spit, wanton exuding from every pore.

"Fuck me," George gasps. His wrists flex under Dream's hands, rippling mercury and trailing rain. "Fuck me now, or I'll kick you out."

"Really." Their lips brush, and every touch buzzes with static because he's not used to kissing

George yet. He's not used to the slide of their tongues, not used to anything other than the crack of his palm upon perfect skin and the rasp of his teeth over a pulsing blue jugular. "I don't think you would. I think you'll take anything I give you, even if I leave you crying for hours."

George levels his stare, features blurring with shimmering heat since they're in such close proximity. "Maybe, but you don't want to. You missed me, didn't you? I know you did."

"What makes you think that?"

"You were *looking* for me," George accuses. "You walked through the corridors and you were looking for me. Usually you see right through everyone."

"You seem to pay a lot of attention to me."

"Hatred requires obsession."

"And obsession breeds something else entirely," Dream finishes.

"It does," George agrees, all private smiles and cheeks cradled by hands larger than his own. Hands stronger than his own, hands he's accustomed to receiving hard discipline from. But there's none of that now, not when George has learnt to play in a way Dream thinks he could fall in love with if he tried.

When George begins to turn over with one languid motion, Dream holds him still, gripping each hip hard enough to leave imprints appearing as burn marks.

"C'mon, face me," he rasps, one hand slipping to run along George's cock, to rub a palm over the head and watch the way it makes him twitch.

George fucks into it, rolling his hips in his search of sweet tension, of dark pollen blossoming at his navel. Slickness connects them when he leans back, hot skin sliding together in all the most sinful places. "R-really?"

"Yeah. Wanna look at you."

He's rewarded with a dawn-smile better than any symphony, teeth all lined up in cheshire contentment. "Knew you think I'm pretty," George mutters borderline incoherently, words hurrying into each other as lethargy takes control of feathered limbs. "'m so pretty Dream, everyone tells me so. Everyone except you. I wanted you to say it the most."

"Pretty boy," he says, kissing George again to drink up the way he tries so desperately to grind his cock against a taut stomach, delicate mouth opening to gasp when it's far too unsatisfactory. And if that's the sort of reaction he gets, Dream doesn't have so much of a problem indulging George for all he's worth. "Where's your lube, pretty?"

"B- *fuck*," George gasps, keening as Dream takes the opportunity to mouth at his hardness, lips dragging over red skin slow enough to scald. "Bottom drawer, hurry up."

He preps George with the sort of swiftness which accompanies familiarity, transfixed by the way his rim stretches around his fingers. They're thick enough to satisfy, thick enough to fill up someone as insatiable as George. He thrusts slow and deep, indulging in every movement George makes because he doesn't feel so guilty about paying attention anymore. Even though he's done it plenty before, Dream isn't tired of the way George gasps and gasps for him, broken little noises pulled from the deepest parts of his being just for Dream to hear.

“You know, I think you like this more than being slapped, don’t you?” he says, curling his fingers to brush against George’s prostate, to do it again and again until he can’t remember how to close his mouth. He’s hyper aware of how George shudders when he calls him pretty, when he tells him how beautiful he is with a violin in his arms. How much better it is to have him on his back, cock straining red against his stomach. “You like being praised.”

“I earnt it,” George says, delayed because his eyelids are still flickering, gentle candlelight to illuminate the darkest pits of hell.

Dream can’t argue with that.

“You ready?” he asks, pulling his fingers free of tight heat. George’s rim flutters, the feeling of being empty suddenly alien to him. The prospect of pushing his hips flush against George’s ass sends ghost spiders across Dream’s navel, tightening with starsilk until he sees in shades of snow and ice, universe boiling down to George and the way he looks lying upon frozen ground.

“*Please.*”

George’s features mar somewhat when Dream is pushing into him, ankles crossing over his back to tug him closer, to appreciate the way his cock becomes trapped between them. He’s panting, nails running along solid gold vertebrae. Dream can tell he hasn’t done this in a while by the way he begs and begs for more, whining at Dream to move faster, to fuck him hard like he deserves for learning to play his violin right.

“Got you,” Dream says, leaning forward until their brows connect, damp with oil slick. “I don’t wanna hurt you, okay?”

“You had no problem with it before,” George groans, head thrown back as an invitation for hot lips to trail over his throat. Darkness haloes him, hair tumbling onto the sheets in soft waves. Dream thinks it’s fortunate his wings were burnt when he fell through the atmosphere, because he wouldn’t be able to lie beneath Dream like this and pull him in with trembling thighs otherwise. “Fuck me, please, *fuck me-*”

George breaks off when Dream thrusts hard, words pitched right through broken glass and left to snap against the sidewalk. His eyes roll up, fingers flying to a nape broader than his own. He bites hard at his bottom lip, little subdued noises fighting their way over his tongue.

That won’t do.

“You have a fucking piano in your apartment, George,” he says, punctuated as he presses deeper and deeper into him, driven half wild with the feeling of tight heat around his cock. “You can be loud for me, can’t you? You sound so perfect when you do.”

And if there’s anything that’ll convince George, it’s the reassurance he’s statuesque enough to rival the gods, carved from pale marble by virtuoso hands. He gasps like he’s clinging to life with bloody fingernails, thighs tightening around Dream’s hips every time he pushes deep into him, every time he brushes over the orb of pleasure he knows sends curses tumbling from gentile lips.

“I’m-”

“You’re close?” Dream knows because George is trembling, muscles contracting under the weight of sinful pleasure he carries, halfway to hell already with dark waters lapping at his ankles. “Cum for me,” he beckons, thrusting right against where he needs it most. It makes George shudder, makes him moan well enough to rival silver wrapped strings.

He kisses George again when he cums, stomachs dripping the colour of death lilies. His hips stutter, pushing George through it as he whines against his tongue, fingers curling into blond hair tight enough to send wishing stars spiralling over Dream's vision. He welcomes the sting of it. Burning acid and scorching flames are his domain, and there's something so right about George pulling at his roots hard enough to ache, even when they're meeting with tongues and lips.

With George tightening around him, it doesn't take long to rush towards the precipice, intent on rejoining the Atlantic and staying there for good. Dream stargazes when he joins George in release, lips hovering over tawny freckles and glittering red nebulas. The black holes of George's features, asteroid rings arcing over his eyes. He spills into tight heat, branding George as his his his, burning hatred boiling down to something just as passionate, something just as terrifyingly addictive.

They don't have to lie in silence this time, rigid and unmoving as corpses.

George's head falls onto his chest, the bud of an edelweiss too heavy for its slender stem. Weighted with spring snow. Lily fingers trace patterns over his chest like George is composing something right onto his skin, marking out tonal shifts and modulations with practised strokes, imaginary lead lines, soft pencil points. Perhaps a sonata, sweet and gentle to mirror how the room stews in hibiscus.

"Do you want to play a duo?" George asks from under curled lashes. Dark and secretive, so pretty Dream thinks he belongs in the middle of a massacred Eden. Beautiful, with crimson dripping from every leaf.

He huffs a laugh. "You actually want to play with me?"

"Yes, *virtuoso*." This time when he says *virtuoso*, it sounds like the sun stretching her limbs out, trembling with sleepiness as she glides over the horizon. It sounds like cinnamon this time, burnt sugar and improbabilities printed onto broadsheet. "I want to play with you. We've done far worse, don't you think?"

Dream hums, fingers brushing through soft hair. He should accept, he should jump at the opportunity to squash George's confidence under a ton of stacked music and steel. But instead, he finds himself yearning for his violin, yearning to see how they'd sound together—just the two of them, revelling in their post-coital haze, heads light and hearts lighter.

"We're fucking naked," he says with the trill of sunrise. "Do you always think about your violin after sex, concertmaster?" In fairness, Dream would probably think about his violin *during* sex if he had one like George's.

George's fingers skim between his ribs, brush over the dips and swells of his bones. Flutter towards his navel, light light light and breathy as he ghosts his bow over the strings. "Not always. But recently, I think I realised it's good to play in the heat of the moment, when the sky's still crashing down around you, and you want to try your best to shoulder it for once. It's good to play when it's raining, when the sun's setting, when the winds blow hard enough to knock you over. Even if I can't play it perfect, it's alright. I'm not in the Carnegie. This is for me. And you, I suppose."

Soft eyes sharpen, regaining comfortable familiarity in an instant. "And besides," George hums, lips hot against Dream's jaw. "You haven't been playing like yourself lately, *virtuoso*. A little lifeless, don't you think?"

“How did you-”

“I think you’d rather die than refuse a solo,” George says conspiratorially. “And I figured perhaps you refused it because you couldn’t play, but you have your muse back now.”

His cheeks ache when he smiles, arms pulling George tight against his chest so their hearts beat in bizarre unison. “I’ll play with you,” he says, forest fires melting away to a crackling hearth. “I want to know how you feel.”

“You know how I feel,” George says, leaning forward to kiss butterflies across imperfect skin. “You know because you taught me how, *imbécile*.”

The colour red is still his favourite, Dream decides. Not just because of pomegranate and blood and fire, but because it’s the colour he sees when he wakes up in George’s bed and the clouds are parted just enough to throw sunlight across his face. Everything is warm, and the sheets are soft under his fingertips, and he doesn’t think he minds. His nose pushes further into the pillow, chasing the smell of linen and iris rather than wrinkling under the force of it.

It takes him a while to break the surface of sleep, water pressing against his face, calming enough to be reminiscent of the womb. Then the cord is tightening, and the water is spilling out of his ears, and he can hear piano flowing from the main section of George’s apartment. He grins to himself. Something tells him he could get used to this—waking up on top of the world, cold hands guiding ivory keys.

He finds one of his shirts in George’s closet, the one he’d stolen the first time they slept together. And never given back. Dream had never been sure *why* until last night, when he realised with a heavy heart that any sort of passionate emotion careens towards the same destination when left unchecked. When fuelled by teeth over skin and eyes squeezed shut in pleasure.

The shirt falls over his head, familiar material trailing in the places it’s stretched beyond repair, and he shuffles towards the music with sleepy manacles weighing his feet.

George is haloed by morninglight, back held perfectly straight as he moves over the keys. The curve of his nose, his brow, his jaw, each glow gold with the sun. Dream can’t help but be pulled closer, warmth pooling in his gut rather than blinding hatred at the sight of George playing music with his face relaxed and feet flexing along with the tempo.

Dream catches a narrow wrist with swift fingers, notes trailing off into nothing as he presses at the jut of bone leading to river veins and snow capped skin. The right hand melody continues in solitude.

“Good morning,” he says, leaning forward until his nose pushes into dark hair. George leans back against him, stretching further and further to reach the keys. “Are you serenading me?”

“I said I would play for you. I don’t turn back on promises.”

A hum of contentment escapes him, and his fingers reach up to interlace with George's. Their skin is illuminated in an instant, thrown into the light because the windows here are too big for their own good. "The weather is nice this morning," he comments, addicted to how their palms feel together. Still, vacant of violin melody.

"It's blossom season."

"We should make the most of it, don't you think?"

George's fingers still on the keys, free hand dropping to rest in his lap. His glasses come off next, refracting sunlight across flowing manuscript when he sets them down upon the ledge in finality, dark eyes blinking to accommodate the adjustment. Dream thinks he knows why. They've never existed together for the sake of existing, never brushed the backs of their hands together with uncertainty and magnolia cheeks. Without the ruse of music to shelter their weathered skulls, they're just like everyone else.

"You want to spend time with me."

"Yeah. I thought that was kinda what happens next, right?"

Pearl teeth chew at a soft bottom lip, only visible because George turns towards him with wide eyes and wonder pinching his cheeks pink.

"Yes. I want that."

There are no thorns lining his throat when he admits George looks perfect with petals falling into his hair, nightlit pools reflecting blue skies, fingers loose in Dream's even though they refuse to acknowledge it. He looks even more perfect in the evening, candlelight flowing over every apex. When they forget about their violins for an entire day, content to submerge themselves in the grey current of faceless people living alongside them.

Strangely enough, Dream's stomach stops turning every time he enters the spotless atrium of George's apartment building. It's one evolution of many. His violin comes back to life, pouring with every grisly emotion he's used to bleeding into his music, but there's something else there too—something softer, something which whispers of spring growth in the voice of Persephone. Pink blossom morphs to green. He laughs at George because the tops of his cheeks catch the sun far too easily, and it looks as if he's blushing.

Most importantly, Dream is performing in the last recital of the academic year. Or rather, they're performing together, and he should hate that he's reliant on another person, but Dream finds he doesn't mind sharing the spotlight. Not when it's George.

They stand metres away from the stage with their violins under respective arms, black shirts

sticking to their skin because it's early June and heat weighs their eyelids. The pianist accompanying them stares at the hem of her dress as it drifts around her feet, music clutched to her stomach with long fingers. She's not looking at them. They might as well be alone, particularly with dimness enshrouding their surroundings.

George notices. He steps closer to Dream, voice pitched down so it comes out candlelit, just a vague impression of honey gold thrown across dark catacombs.

"Good luck," he murmurs, chin tipping upwards so he can meet Dream's gaze. Autumn and Summer, flowing together as though the fabric of the fucking earth hasn't unwound itself and tied them together as the seasons changed this year.

But some things will always stay the same. "Try to keep up, alright?" he teases wickedly. "Don't fall behind."

"Stick to the tempo," George bites in reply, eyes glittering.

A smile slips across the bottom half of his face, higher one side than the other. An eyebrow lifted in amusement. "But it's so fun when you fuck it up. Then I get to s—"

"Dream, Dream," George begs, dropping the facade the way he does when the world's not watching them, when his strad is locked away in its case and they're not thinking about music for once. When their fingers lace together, and Dream isn't filled with the urge to snap each one. "Not before we go on stage, okay? You don't seem to understand this is my last performance before I graduate. It needs to be right."

"But you play better when you're turned on."

"*Dream*. I'm nervous already, shut up."

Dream hums, and the venom ebbs away from his tongue, free hand cradling George's jaw with sincerity. "You'll be fine," he promises, leaning forward to press a kiss to glowing skin. It's hot under his lips, flushed pink with sunlight and adrenaline. "You made me practise it with you for hours, remember?"

"I just want it to be perfect."

Everything George plays is perfect now he's learnt to stop imagining each note precisely as it appears on the page and allow the sound to move him instead. He still practises for so long his neck is stamped with the evidence of it, but Dream knows when to pull him away from his music stand and exist together without violins in their arms for a while. *You'll ruin it if you keep playing*, Dream will tease, arms tentatively wrapping around a marble waist as if he's still not quite certain he can really have this. *Do something with me instead*.

George will feign irritation, but thank him anyway.

"It'll be perfect. It's us. We're the best violinists in the whole school."

"Alright."

He kisses his mouth this time, fast and fleeting considering they're standing behind a stage door and there's an audience waiting for them. When it's late evening and they're in George's apartment together, he'll do it properly, kiss every inch of him and bite and suck until he's painted with muted scarlet.

But for now, he follows George out onto the stage, lips parted to reveal his teeth in a way that's genuine for the first time. They don't care about appearing poised, perfectly polite. They're here to create music, invoke emotion, leave the stage flickering with kerosene flame and the air full of lemon seltzer, vibrant and brimming with summer.

His skin burns under the lightning rig. George's hair falls in soft waves over his forehead, and his hands itch to take him apart, pull at his shirt hard enough to send mother of pearl skittering over the floor, remove moon shaped glasses and run his lips over sugared cheekbones. Tug the crest ring off with his teeth, make George feel like he's worth *nothing* for a while, before promising him the world in the aftermath.

Dream loves performing, but he's learning to love everything which comes with it a little more.

They raise their bows, gazes locked in anticipation, fingers poised and warm light illuminating them. The pianist begins, and the guillotine falls, severing all their differences in two so they can bleed and bleed and allow their blood to bind with a mutual love for music.

And they don't hate each other so much any more, and they don't need to. Not when they sound so good together, not when they lift their violins and pull the heavens down, claw hell out of the earth with jagged nails to burn the horizon to ashes.

The first note sounds in unison, and all they want to do is play more.

They perform as though they'll die tomorrow, music tangling together to flood the concert hall.

Their hearts thrum in perfect cadence.

Chapter End Notes

edit: wake up there's a sequel now scroll down a bit to see the series link ok cool enjoy

awww theyre sort of cute arent they

I honest to god spilt boiling water on both my hands earlier and it hurt so fucking bad but since i could still move my fingers it wasn't gonna stop me from finishing this fucking fanfic, i swear to god. With this in mind please give me kudos :) please

look at [THIS ART](#) and [THIS ART](#) right now, i cannot fucking believe my fic inspired it like jesus christ i never wish to look at anything else ever again. what's next OH YEAH please read [de profundis](#) for more enemies content!! it's one of my faves of all time. also thank u to all my friends who have had to listen to me talking about this fic incessantly - especially moon, bitter, mental, finn and cure <3 ur the best i love you

i hope ur all having wonderful days!!
Saint <3

End Notes

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